

LECTORATE  
THOUGHT LEADERSHIP  
IN A SOCIETY OF CHANGE

# Shifting

Dr Mignon van Halderen

# Paradigms

*Thought Leadership as  
Instigator of Societal Change*

Dutch School of Thought  
Fontys University of Applied Sciences  
School of Communication Eindhoven  
The Netherlands



**Fontys**

University of  
Applied Sciences



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This publication is an elaborate version of the inaugural speech of Dr Mignon van Halderen, which was given on 15 October 2015 at Fontys University of Applied Sciences, School of Communication Eindhoven, the Netherlands.

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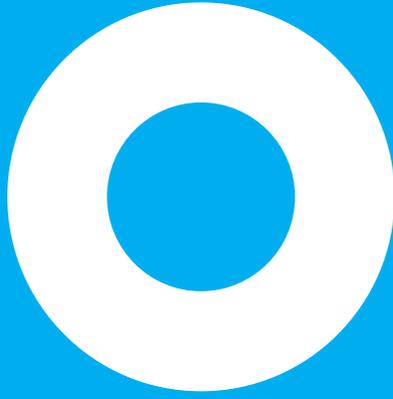
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## A note to my readers

This publication is a detailed version of my inaugural speech at Fontys University of Applied Sciences, School of Communication in Eindhoven. It is addressed to leaders, managers, employees, advisers, students, lecturers and researchers who are involved in organisations pursuing thought leadership strategies. To refer to the different roles of my readers, I will use the term 'practitioners' in this publication.

You will notice that I refer to both the *Fontys Lectorate Thought Leadership in a Society of Change* as well as *Dutch School of Thought*. The lectorate aims to build a movement of people who connect to thought leadership. The virtual home of this international movement is the Dutch School of Thought - an international interdisciplinary institute on the domain of thought leadership, powered by Fontys University of Applied Sciences, School of Communication in Eindhoven. The Dutch School of Thought embodies our blended vision on thought leadership; a vision that I will elaborate on in this publication.

The lectorate and the Dutch School of Thought operate as twins; similar entities working hand-in-hand, each of which has its own unique focus. With the lectorate, we aim to conduct applied research to develop new insights on thought leadership and, by sharing these insights, bridge education, research and the organisational field in the domain of thought leadership. It is with the Dutch School of Thought that we aim to get an international movement of people started that focuses on developing thought leadership to become a substantively meaningful and pioneering positioning strategy.

You will also see that I sometimes personify the lectorate and Dutch School of Thought by using the term 'I' and at other times by referring to 'we'. When using 'we', I am referring to the team of people of which the lectorate and the Dutch School of Thought consists: our researchers, affiliated lecturers, students as well as knowledge partners and members. I choose to use 'I' when I deliberately explain the vision that I developed on several themes involving *Thought Leadership in a Society of Change*.

# 1 | Introduction - a society of change



Most of us work either for or in organisations. These organisations range from stock-market listed companies, social entrepreneurs, non-profits to institutions, universities, schools or consulting firms.

While the organisations that we all work for differ in size, focus, culture or people, what connects us is the fact that our organisations are finding themselves in the middle of societal change.

On a global level, the financial crisis has driven many of us to adopt the conviction that we need to extricate ourselves from the neo-classical vision that has led our economy for years; a generally mechanistic and dehumanised view of economic society driven by cost-effectiveness and profit maximisation without reflecting on human and environmental sustainability issues (Jurriaanse, 2015).

On a business level, we are observing a rise in CEOs and other executives who are embracing 'social purpose' as part of their business values. CEOs such as Paul Polman of Unilever and Feike Sijbesma of DSM are just two of these refreshing examples. Social enterprises, such as Tony Chocolonely, Patagonia or Tesla are organisations that apply commercial and entrepreneurial strategies to maximise improvements in human and environmental well-being. Investors with a social focus are also on the rise.

On a societal level, we are seeing an upsurge in (groups of) people who seek to distance themselves from establishments in our society. In the Netherlands, an increasing number of people do not pursue a permanent employment contract, and find their flexibility and freedom by starting their own company (van 't Veer & Dorr, 2014). People turn away from ingrained consumerism and feel more comfortable in sharing things with people they trust.

What binds all these developments is, in my view, an underlying need on the part of society and individuals to make our economic and societal

system more human and sustainable. Hence, there is a growing need to shake loose old ways of acting, disregarding ingrained, interlocked systems and replacing old types of logic for refreshing new ones. We are desperately searching for new thoughts, new types of logic, new worldviews.

What we are talking about here is not simply incremental change. That is to say, incremental modifications in the way we work, the way we have organised our communities or society as a whole. This is often called *first-order* change – slight adjustments in structures, programmes or politics in order to better implement strategies or policies (Bartunek, 1984). Nothing transformational here. Things stay the same, the old story can still be told, and much of it would still be reversible. It's also not quite *second-order change* in which organisations and societal communities shift from one set of fundamental beliefs about who they are and what they mean to another – one that fits in better with its changing (competitive) environment.

What we have been dealing with over the past few years in our society is what we could call *third-order change*: fundamental transitions in how we deal with important societal themes. With respect to many themes (healthcare, education, energy), we find ourselves right in the middle of a transition about to take place (Rotmans, 2014). It is precisely this third-order change that requires us to shake loose old ways of thinking and acting. It requires an awareness of our current ways of thinking and a transformation to something quite new, different and even impossible to grasp. A transformation in which we often aren't even aware yet to what it will transform. It may be beyond the grasp of our reasoning or imagination, but we just know that there is a future reality that suits us better.

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As the Dutch designer and innovator Daan Roosegaarde describes it: 'We are searching for a new system, but we don't know what that looks like yet. It doesn't matter; this is in fact characterising the "new thinking". We search, we experiment (Boerman, 2013).'

Third-order change is therefore to some extent fragile; the process is vulnerable, uncertain and full of questions. It requires new learning and

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new stories that have to be told. It is disorienting in its process, but at the same time, it reveals when new realities start to take shape.

I'd venture to say that the majority of you is triggered by these transformational changes. I'd also be so bold as to say that you are challenged by the question of how your organisation should position itself vis-à-vis these changes. After all, the fact is that organisations can no longer disconnect themselves from the transformative dynamics in our society. We are living in a society that is in transition with respect to many different themes. This begs the question: how is my organisation going to position itself vis-à-vis these transitions? While we are interested in transitions as a whole, the lectorate's focus is specifically on studying the paradigm shifts accompanying these transitions and how organisations take a logical role in these processes of paradigm shifting.

Since my PhD research at the Rotterdam School of Management at Erasmus University, I have been studying how organisations (profit, non-profit, private or public) perceive themselves relative to societal change and, particularly, how their positioning evolves vis-à-vis these societal changes (van Halderen, et al., 2014; Hunter, et al., 2013; van Halderen, et al., 2011). Organisations that are driven by their unique convictions, that question status quo thinking and propose alternative realities; these are more often realities in which business and societal goals blend together. Not just for the sake of questioning the status quo but because they embrace alternative ways of thinking that may ignite changes. Organisations that dare to express novel viewpoints and, by doing so, 'galvanise others to think new thoughts, modify the way they have always done things, and embark on new behaviours, new paths, and new actions to transform the world (Brosseau, 2013, p. xvi).'

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It is by the virtue of their ability to translate their thought-provoking convictions into real behaviour that they are called thought leaders in a society of change. They are organisations that are led by a novel viewpoint on our society and that show leadership in translating these viewpoints into real behaviour and results.

Such organisations may be rare. We might call them ‘a dime a dozen’ and therefore disregard them as not being part of our own organisational reality. However, this is not the point. The point is that we can learn from their unique way of doing things. It is by looking at the extreme, that we can get inspired to stimulate new ways of thinking and doing, serve our future reality.

So, what characterises such companies? What does their positioning look like? How do these companies break away from old, established types of logic and mindsets and spur new ways of thinking? More to the point: how do they visibly contribute to new worldviews, to new *paradigms*? Many of us recognise the increasing role of organisations in driving positive societal change processes, but the essential cognitive process of breaking down old worldviews and building up new ones has rarely been studied. This is remarkable, since shifts in mindsets, or worldviews, are a prerequisite for fundamental change.

To better understand how struggles in the process of paradigm shifts play out, the *Fontys Lectorate Thought Leadership in a Society of Change* examines how thought-leading organisations drive paradigm shifts as a prerequisite for transformational change to take place in this respect. In the following chapters, I first explain in more detail the differences between first-, second- and third-order change. Chapter 3 addresses the notion of paradigms and paradigm shifts and the importance of shifting paradigms to realise societal change. In Chapter 4, I make the connection between these ideas and our blended vision on thought leadership. I explain thought leadership as both a form of positioning *and* strategy, driving paradigm shifts in order to contribute to transformations on important themes in our society (third-order change). As part of this, I elaborate on what, in my view, is the proper role of communication professionals: important contributors to instigating paradigm shifts through their skills in not only imagining, shaping and expressing new realities, but also living up to them. With this point of view on thought leadership and the role of communication professionals, I will outline the mission and plans of the Dutch School of Thought in Chapter 5.

## 2 | Three types of change



As previously mentioned, we can discern between three types of change. See Figure 1 for an illustration of the three types of change.

### 2.1 First-order change: incremental

This form of change refers to incremental adjustments in the way an organisation works. It involves a slight modification within the existing structure of the organisation. Examples include adjustments to the organisation's inventory system, financial administration or team structure, merely for purposes of a more effective and efficient implementation of the company's strategy. First-order change alters ways of working, not really the fundamental beliefs on which the organisation is operating. First-order changes are incremental and often reversible. The existing paradigm remains and is left unquestioned.

### 2.2 Second-order change: radical

This type of change involves a radical shift away from the company's fundamental beliefs. Such shifts become for instance necessary when an organisation gets out of sync with its environment (Sheldon, 1980, p. 63). When this mismatch becomes substantial, previously taken-for-granted assumptions about the core, distinctive and enduring attributes of the organisation must be challenged and need to change to better fit within the changing environment (Reger, et al., 1994; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Second-order change involves cognitive reorientations of the organisation (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) whereby employees and other stakeholders are asked to understand and accept a new, preferred reality of the organisation (Gioia, et al., 1994). It is generally seen as the task of leadership to secure these shifts in shared meaning and it is then the role of language, symbolism and metaphors to give meaning to this new future reality. Second-order change is much more rare than first-order change but is probably a type of change that many of us have undergone or managed within our own organisation.

Second-order change does not only occur within organisations. Numerous studies have examined how shifts in types of logic are taking place within organisational fields or societal groups and how actors may take an active entrepreneurial role in order to change types of logic in ways that serve their purposes (Greenwood, et al., 2002; Maguire, et al., 2004; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006). Examples include the case of gay and HIV-positive groups of people advocating changing HIV/AIDS treatment (Maguire, et al., 2004), the role of accounting and associated professional associations in radically changing the field of accountancy (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Greenwood, et al., 2002), and the introduction of nouvelle cuisine as opposed to the traditional cuisine in French restaurants (Rao, et al., 2003).

### 2.3 Third-order change: transformative

Although the last form of change is a much less familiar form, it is still a form of change that is becoming increasingly more important in our society.

An essential, basic assumption about third-order change is that we often don't know yet what our future reality will look like. While second-order change involves a process of giving people a sense of a new, desired conceptualisation of future reality, third-order change allows for future realities that are, at first glance, hard to conceptualise. We have, for instance, no clue about what a society driven by robotic technology will look like. We are now educating children who are going to work in a society that is transforming intensively. We guess, speculate, hypothesise but we have no 'pre-set' conceptualisation of this new reality. We have clues, imagining this new reality, but there is not a 'fixed' new reality that we can grasp yet. There are so many elements influencing change and there are so many ongoing changes within that change that it takes time for us to create new understandings.

Bartunek and Moch (1994) intelligibly describe how third-order changes require us to move beyond our existing concepts or schema. According to the authors, we are dealing with changes that ask us to move toward a future reality that is based on 'transconceptual modes of understanding

(p. 25)'. Changes that require paradigm shifts in which we become aware of experiences that cannot be embodied by any of our existing conceptual schema. Such changes are generally not confined to just the organisation in question, but affect larger societal changes. As described by Tsoukas & Papoulias (2005), 'the organisation needs to be seen in its broader institutional context, not as a self-contained economic entity (p. 80).'

It is third-order change that is the focus of the Lectorate Thought Leadership and the Dutch School of Thought. We take the assumption as our starting point that thought-leading organisations embrace and aim to contribute to third-order change.

Thought leadership is, in my view, about the ability to shift or even tilt paradigms in a society characterised by the need for third-order change; this is a way of thinking about thought leadership that has so far been overlooked. To better understand the role of paradigm shifts in these types of change, the next chapter zooms in on the meaning of paradigms and paradigm shifts.

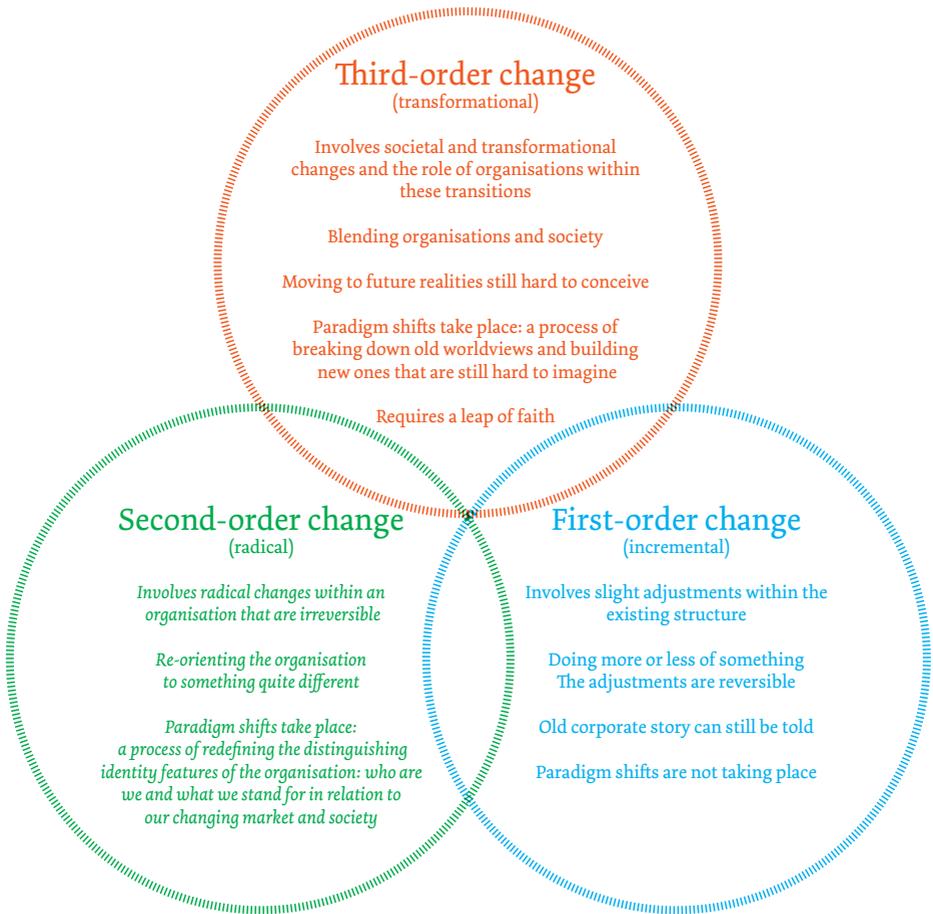


Figure 1: The characteristics of first-order, second-order and third-order change

## 3 | The role of paradigm shifts in a society of change



Nowadays, the term 'paradigm, along with its companion paradigm shift, is embarrassingly everywhere (Hacking, 1962, p. xix).' As a result, the meaning of the term is increasingly becoming watered down. Many also use the term in a superficial way. So, if we want to study the role of paradigm shifts in societies of change, we first need to equip ourselves with a good understanding of its original meanings. This is what I aim to do in this chapter.

### 3.1 What are paradigms and paradigm shifts?

Our current understanding of paradigms has been largely influenced by the American physicist and philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn. Thomas Kuhn was interested in how scientific knowledge evolves. He claimed that the practices of a certain scientific community are influenced by the earlier successful achievements of scholars in that scientific community. These scholars' achievements were becoming 'exemplary' for this scientific community's traditional ways of thinking and practices. It was becoming the 'paradigm', the 'constellation of concepts, values, perceptions and practices shared by a community, which forms a particular vision of reality that is the basis of the way a community organizes itself (Capra, 1996, p. 6).' To Kuhn (1962), this meant that scientific communities are not so much guided by the practice of *objective research* but by their existing paradigm. According to Kuhn, the current paradigm is seldom questioned. New results are only marginal and mostly confirm the current paradigm. Results contradicting the paradigm are ignored or regarded as irrelevant. It is only once in a while that existing paradigms are shaken up. Indeed, only when existing models do not offer a well-enough explanation for observed phenomena, or if a new model convincingly shows new explanatory power, a *paradigm shift* takes place. A classic example is the theory of Copernicus that replaced the paradigm that the sun moves around the earth. However, even in more modern science, paradigm shifts also take place. Capra, for instance, studied the shift from linear thinking to systems thinking in science, and the implications that this new way

of conceiving reality had on other sciences such as Gestalt theory and ecology (Capra, 1996).

Nowadays, the idea of paradigms has also been frequently used within organisational contexts. To study paradigms within organisations, scholars have used a variety of terms such as 'worldviews', 'master scripts', 'ideologies', 'schemata', 'interpretive scheme' and, according to some scholars, even 'cultures'. The American scholar Pfeffer (1981) talks of paradigms as 'systems of shared meaning' and argues that organisations are not so much systems of structures, programmes, rules and regulations, but systems of people with a shared meaning. He goes on to say that organisational paradigms are important because people want to develop understandings of their organisational world so that they have enough predictability and control to take action (1981, p. 4). Moreover, people feel a desire to relate their personal meaning to the collective meaning or 'purpose' of the organisation, or at least the unit or division they work for. Paradigms, or shared worldviews, can create a sense of belonging and also respond to our need to distinguish ourselves from other groups or organisations (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). So, paradigms 1) provide meaning, 2) create a feeling of belonging as well as 3) group distinctiveness and 4) are a cognitive anchor point from which to take action and make decisions. As Kaplan nicely puts it: we 'make choices and act from within that understanding (Kaplan, 2008)'.

Paradigms also exist within the different environments that organisations have to contend with (for instance, the industry that they work in or the field or profession in which they operate). Paradigms within these organisational fields are often referred to in the academic literature as 'institutional logics: underlying assumptions, deeply held, often unexamined, which form a framework within which reasoning takes place (Horn, 1983 in Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005, p. 37)'. Along similar lines as those I described above, logics within a certain field (an industry, a religious order, a field or profession) provide 'guidelines for practical action (Rao, et al., 2003, p. 795)'. The actions, in turn, further re-emphasise logics, making it even more ingrained, stable and durable. The same argument applies here as that described earlier: because these logics are strongly institutionalized, it is quite understandable why they are so difficult to change.

Paradigms can be explicit or implicit. They are taken for granted, deep-seated, often undisputed and generally strongly intertwined with people's values, sentiments or emotions about the value of things. It is precisely these features of being deep-seated, taken for granted, sensitive, and undisputed that paradigms come to have great stability and paradigm shifts are extremely challenging.

Yet, despite their rigidity, paradigms are not frozen (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006, p. 28). All sorts of events such as technological innovations, social upheaval, financial crises, innovative disruptors or the acts of social movement groups can challenge ingrained ways of thinking, increase awareness of 'alternate logics' and 'change the intellectual climate of ideas', thereby 'enabling the possibility of change (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006, p. 28)'.

In fact, for societal change to happen, we need to be able to let go of traditional paradigms and make way for new ones.

### 3.2 The role of paradigm shifts in a society of change

Both second-order and third-order change involve the shifting of paradigm, yet both on a slightly different level. Second-order change involves a process of cognitive re-orientation whereby it is often the task of leaders and managers to ask employees and other relevant stakeholders to shift their views about their organisation from one shared system of meaning to a new one preferred by leaders. This often comes down to an internal process of re-conceptualising the organisation's identity-defining features in terms of what the organisation is, what it does and why it does the things it does (Schultz, et al., 2000). These forms of paradigm shifts are often challenging processes, yet have a certain amount of predictability because leaders often have a well-formulated vision of their newly desired identity and they seek to impose this new reality onto their organisation.

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Third-order change, which is much more closely linked to societal change, may be more unpredictable than second-order change within organisa-

tions. It involves moving toward a new societal reality that is inevitably going to influence our daily lives, but we have little clue yet how this new reality will manifest itself in our society and how it will change the lives of people, communities or organisations. All we know is that the current situation has become untenable and our society needs change. We know for instance that our world population will rise and that increasingly more people will be living in cities by 2050, but we cannot yet concretely define what our cities will look like in order to ensure all these urban citizens have safe, healthy and comfortable city lives.

Hence, in order for third-order change to happen, we need for people and communities to break free from their old paradigm, to take a leap of faith in order to move to a new reality that is not yet out there. This is what we call paradigm shifting, and we see it as the role of organisations to contribute to shifting paradigms and third-order change. We already see these processes happening in cities. 'Whereas national governments are stuck in their own bureaucratic inertia and partisan politics, towns are bubbling with energy, optimism and vigour. (Tegenlicht – The power to the City, 2014)' Indeed, pragmatic city leaders and networks of citizens are re-inventing their cities by implementing innovative and pragmatic solutions to problems such as energy supply, elderly care and poverty.

However, professionals who have worked on transitions know that you work on each level of change and that the three levels are interdependent (see Figure 1). In order for organisations to actually contribute to third-order change, they need to re-orient their ideas of how they see themselves vis-à-vis the changing society, which requires second-order change. After all, the less predictable the future reality to which they aim to contribute is, the more important it becomes for organisations to reconsider their own identity in light of these changes, as it serves as their anchor point in taking their leap of faith. Contributing to third-order change also requires first-order change because their transformational decisions will certainly have implications for adjusting their current structures and programmes.

However, despite the interdependence of these types of change, third-order change is often overlooked if not outright neglected.

People think they are dealing with third-order change, when in actual fact, it is only second-order change. They may reflect on how they are relating to societal changes and re-position themselves accordingly, but they do not actually play a noticeable role in contributing to fundamental future change.

## 4 | Thought leadership as instigator of societal change



In the previous chapter, I discussed the role of paradigm shifts in third-order change. At the Dutch School of Thought, we view thought leaders as companies contributing to these changes by challenging old worldviews and realising new ones through their provocative thoughts (embodied in novel points of view) and living up to them through related substantial actions.

### 4.1 Two types of logic underlying thought leadership

To further elaborate on this view, I will first outline two existing types of logic on thought leadership. I will then argue why these two forms of logic should be better combined by practitioners and organisations seeking to equip their organisation for future change.

#### 4.1.1 Thought leadership with a strategic focus

The first type of logic on thought leadership carries a strong business rationale. By the 1970s, B-to-B companies like McKinsey & Company, the Boston Consulting Group and Bain & Company started to embrace new ways of raising their profiles and setting themselves apart from their competitors by showcasing their intellectual capacities in order to be seen by clients as their ‘trusted voice’ on the problems and issues that mattered to them (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2007; *Economist*, 2010). To this end, B-to-B companies started to develop ‘thought leadership publications (e.g., McKinsey Quarterly)’, through which they circulated their intellectual ideas and refreshing insight, reframing how companies think about their key business problems (Young, 2013; van Halderen, et al., 2013). These publications were since then dubbed as ‘thought-leadership publications’ and their intellectual content was referred to as ‘thought leadership’. Circulating these intellectual works became for many consulting firms an effective way to raise their profile and position their brand as being ‘intellectually superior to the competition (Crainer & Dearlove, 1999, p. 27).’ The sharing of intellectual ideas and break-

through models is for companies like McKinsey & Company and the Boston Consulting Group the currency they use to build their brand and find their competitive advantage.

Nowadays, more and more companies such as Booz & Company, Cap Gemini and Goldman Sachs are embracing thought leadership, and PR agencies are developing full-on thought leadership strategies for their clients (Bourne, 2015). They hire thought leadership directors and teams dedicated to promote 'their thought leadership'. By leveraging their untapped intellectual capacities, conducting in-depth research and packaging these intellectual ideas and insights in the form of whitepapers, editorial articles, appealing videos or speeches at 'thought leading' platforms such as the World Economic Forum, they seek to be seen as the 'trusted voice' and the authority on complex matters that concern their clients and customers.

Today, we see that these complex matters are increasingly connected to societal issues that organisations can no longer afford to ignore. Companies like IBM or Philips saw the market landscape changing and realised that in today's ever more complex society, clients are increasingly confronted with social, economic or environmental problems. Innovative products themselves are no longer sufficient; they are on the lookout for refreshing ways of thinking, for new perspectives, that help them reframe their key issues and move toward new insights and solutions (van Halderen & Kettler-Paddock, 2012). Companies such as IBM and Philips saw a window of opportunity for linking their positioning to societal themes that mattered to their clients and relevant stakeholders on an increasing level. For instance, IBM's clients in the business-to-government field are not so much interested in IBM selling IT solutions or software as they are in gaining insights and solutions that help them overcome today's challenges concerning important themes such as city infrastructure or global water management. Packaged as their Smarter Planet campaign and launched in 2008, IBM addressed their (potential) clients' concerns by challenging their conventional thinking on how some of the world's issues should be viewed. Through various communication platforms, they reached their audiences (city leaders, CEOs, health care specialists) with a 'systems point of view' on their essential problems.

Their viewpoint was perhaps not radically new (we previously discussed the idea of 'systems thinking' in our section about paradigms), but it was compellingly and provokingly tied to how we should look at many of the problems we face today. IBM certainly took a positioning focus with respect to its thought leadership, but it also embraced the transformation logic as explained in the next paragraph, as you will see in paragraph 4.2.

Consumers also seem increasingly more attracted to brands that challenge the status quo on themes that touch their daily lives. Although it met with critique and controversy (Burns, 2014), the Self-Esteem Campaign of Unilever's personal care brand Dove is a frequently referred-to example of thought leadership in the consumer branding world. The brand cleverly tapped into the gut feelings of many women about the disturbingly unrealistic beauty standards set by the beauty industry. An untapped societal concern that was just there for the taking. Dove jumped at the chance, and addressed women's concerns by promulgating a compelling viewpoint on the definition of beauty. With its point of view, the brand challenged society's distorted view of beauty and sparked further debate about the issue. The campaign boosted brand attitudes, word-of-mouth advertising and consumers' tendency to buy the brand's products (van Halderen, et al., 2013). More recently, Procter & Gamble's Always brand launched the #LikeaGirl video, in which it challenges the conventional idea that girls and women are weaker, more fragile or unstable than boys or men. In the campaign, the brand challenges its audience by posing the question why the saying 'Like a girl' is so often used as an insult instead of a compliment. The campaign clearly challenges unquestioned ways of thinking and behaving in our society that are taken for granted. As such, Always is stretching customers' brand perceptions far beyond the female products that it sells.

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Thus, the underlying logic of thought leadership here is that stakeholders are increasingly attentive to refreshing viewpoints that break away from old individual schemas or collective paradigms, helping them to find new solutions for their important issues (Alexander & Badings, 2012). The assumption is that thought leadership may provide just that. If your company has the capability to offer thought leadership, customers will regard your firm as a trusted voice and a preferred partner to work with (Badings, 2009).

#### 4.1.2 Thought leaders with a transformation focus

Thought leaders with a transformation focus take a visible role in driving desired societal changes. This includes organisations that are convinced of a future reality that does not yet exist, and are therefore willing to take a leap of faith into this unknown reality. They are prepared to openly challenge the status quo and bring about substantial change, starting with their own strategic choices, practices and cultures. These types of companies are not just pursuing thought leadership for the sake of achieving the position; these types of companies have a revolutionary drive. It is precisely because of this that we refer to them as transformation-focused thought leaders. Apple is a frequently cited example.

Another example of such a challenger to the established order is the American developer of electronic cars, Tesla. In a market still dominated by cars running on petrol, Tesla wants to ensure that everyone can drive affordable electric vehicles (for further information about Tesla, see the Trending Topic of Bran Martens 'Thought Leadership – two streams of thought' on [www.dutchschoolofthought.com](http://www.dutchschoolofthought.com)).

Nowadays, such companies are often dubbed as 'core-purpose' driven companies (Collins & Porras, 1996; Sinek, 2009). Companies whose purpose goes beyond the mere maximisation of profits; they attach social meaning to what they do. These organisations are called 'meaning-driven companies'. Transformation-focused thought leaders are certainly meaning-driven, but there is something more specific to them that makes them *thought* leading. The subtle difference is an important one to illuminate, because it directs our attention to where it is needed by organisations in order for (paradigmatic) change to occur.

While transformation-focused thought leaders are certainly driven by a purpose, it is not the purposefulness that defines them as thought leading. Transformation-focused thought leaders are known for articulating their purpose in such a way that it becomes a status quo-unlocking, inspiring and mobilising viewpoint about what this new reality may be like. Organisations become characterised as thought leading in a revolutionary sense when people see them openly and visibly speaking up about and standing up for their alternative viewpoints on important

themes in society (Murray, 2012). They strongly desire shifts in world-views and believe in a future reality that better responds to the problems, needs, contradictions and desired values, norms and lifestyles that we recognise these days. Since transformation-focused thought leaders seek change in collective thoughts and actions, they back up their viewpoints with their own actions. They lead by example through compelling actions (see box 1).

There is more to transformation-focused thought leadership that we need to consider to appreciate it as being different from the first type of thought leadership. Promulgating future realities that are hard to conceive places organisations in a vulnerable position. Not only because these organisations openly speak out and take a stand in often difficult discussions, but mostly because they take a leap of faith and therefore exist somewhere between a *current* and *future* reality. It is a process which can be disorienting, because they know what they want to shift, but do not know how this shift will come about. Stakeholders of an organisation, not the least significant of which are employees, may find it difficult to understand the new reality. They do not see the merits, particularly if this new reality gives rise to feelings of letting go of old realities that serve their self-interests, or when the newly endorsed reality does not yet seem to correspond to operational realities. Since these processes involve uncertainty, unpredictability and also scepticism, they tend to be controversial and require comprehension and justification challenges. These challenges involve building trust among important stakeholders (see box 2) and, on a related note, proving one's authenticity in their thought-leading purpose.

● BOX 1:

*Tony Chocolonely going against ingrained assumptions in the cacao-industry*

Tony Chocolonely is a chocolate producer that combines the articulation of a novel point of view with compelling actions to drive change in the cacao industry. The company strives for a future in which the production of cacao is 100% slave-labour free. The cacao industry is immensely complex with powerful chocolate dealers and chocolate manufacturers that have an economical interest in keeping the cacao prices to farmers low. So the chances are that the complete abolishment of slavery may never happen. Moreover, given the complexity of changing this whole system, it is still hard to imagine what such a new reality would be like. While most people in the cacao sector are aware of the problems of slavery, many just believe that they are insufficient to drive the change, or that it should be the responsibility of other parties in the field. Tony Chocolonely's viewpoint is different. This company is convinced that an end can be put to slavery. Their core purpose, abolishing modern slavery, is a viewpoint that goes straight against ingrained assumptions that are taken for granted in the industry. Tony shows its commitment to its point of view through compelling forms of communication and actions. It has created a roadmap to its future reality of 100% slave-free chocolate, including 55 goals with measurable targets for most of these goals.

○ BOX 2:

*Dutch municipality Bergeijk speaks out, stands up and mobilises people to contribute to shifting paradigms and change in the healthcare system*

While many of my examples involve for-profit organisations, we also see thought leadership at non-profit organisations. In light of the soaring healthcare costs and public discontent about the functioning of the Dutch healthcare system, the community of Bergeijk in the south of the Netherlands has been the proverbial David taking on Goliath. Bergeijk is outspoken in its viewpoint that healthcare should be removed from the stronghold of management and bureaucracy, and that all parties in the healthcare sector should return to the 'essence' of healthcare. From here, they should re-evaluate how to invest public money and deploy human resources in the sector. Bergeijk sees the healthcare transition as more than a cut; a transformation in how we view healthcare is required.

Initially this was a one-man operation, initiated by the alderman Frank van der Meijden, in response to the new Social Support Act of 2015. This new law called for shifting the responsibility of social healthcare to local communities, encouraging more independence and self-reliance on the part of those in need of healthcare. Van der Meijden launched a successful programme to support the citizens of Bergeijk and ensure them that they would not be abandoned when it came to their healthcare needs. This was accompanied by a successful media campaign which generated a lot of appreciation and interest on the part of other municipalities, triggering them to adopt Bergeijk's new model. The alderman has managed to rally more like-minded councillors and representatives around him. The next step for the community is to organize inspiration sessions with healthcare providers, consultants and innovative entrepreneurs working in the healthcare sector. This bundling of strengths was preceded by intensive lobbying by the alderman and his team .

## 4.2 The vision of Dutch School of Thought : blending both types of logic

Taken separately, the two types of logic reflect different motivations for organisations to embrace thought leadership.

Amongst communication professionals who have made thought leadership a priority in their strategic plans, I mostly see the first type of logic: achieving the positioning of thought leadership as the company's primary driver. This is understandable because this is what they are held accountable for by their immediate supervisors. I have also seen practitioners who firmly believe in the second view on thought leadership and strongly distance themselves from the first. Any organisation that combines its societal change purposes with strategic purposes would be seen as unauthentic and is therefore inherently 'wrong'. To these practitioners, intentionally contributing to change does not reconcile with the logic of competitive positioning and seeking business opportunities.

In today's dynamically changing society however, this distinction between the strategic and transformation focus on thought leadership is not nearly so cut and dried. There are companies whose reason to exist has always been to transform the societal issues that matter to them; these are the so-called social entrepreneurs of our time. Nonetheless, social entrepreneurs are well aware of the fact that it is precisely their transformative message that attracts stakeholders to their company and boosts their brand and competitive positioning. There are also companies that are keenly focused on their competitive positioning, but believe they can only achieve results by igniting transformational change on the issues that matter to us today. In their thinking, you see both views on thought leadership combined. Unilever is a case in point (see box 3).

The notion that companies blend both types of logic to different degrees is illustrated in Figure 2. The chart depicts both types of logic as two dimensions on a continuum. While it must be stressed that the plotting is tentative, the figure helps to structure our thinking about the different foci of our own organisation's thought leadership. Where do you think that your organisation lies on the continuum, and, perhaps even more important, where should it lie? On the left side of the continuum,

● BOX 3:

*Unilever - both types of logics combined*

Unilever says that it wants to drive transformational change on those societal issues that matter to its business as well as to the world. Unilever's novel viewpoint is reflected in the vision that it can double the size of its business while reducing its environmental footprint and increasing its positive social impact (Unilever, 2015). To achieve this, the company is undergoing a transformative change – it is radically changing its own business model and encourages its suppliers and other business partners to do the same. While this may at first glance look like thought leadership with a transformation focus, the company is open and clear about the fact that its viewpoints on sustainability and the resulting behaviour reflect positively on its brands. As the company says: 'We have found that doing business sustainably is possible and that brands that incorporate sustainability in their range are more appealing to consumers.'

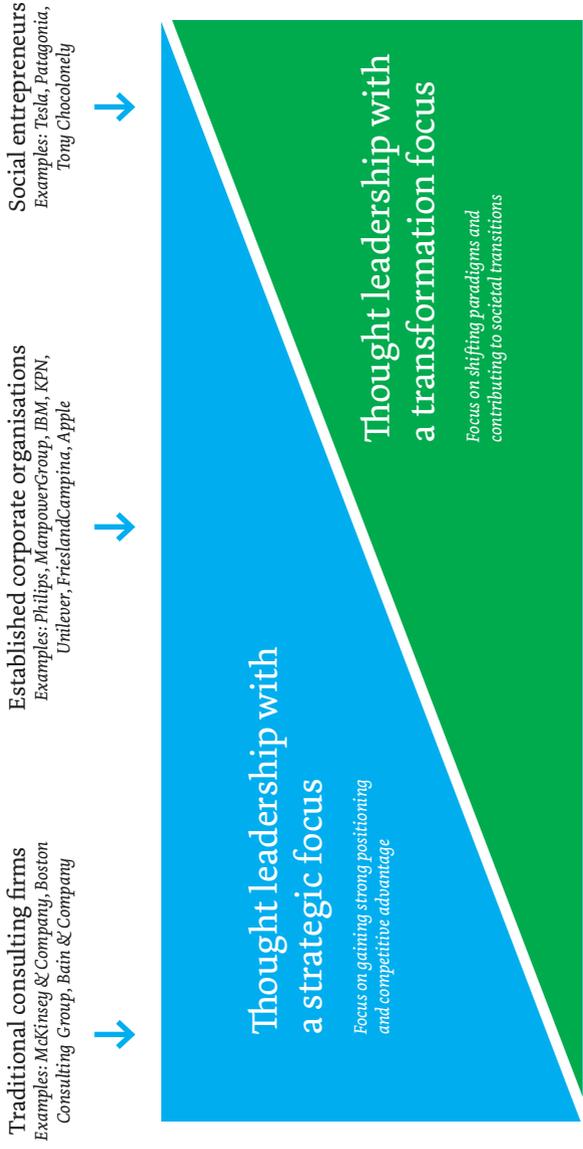


Figure 2: Continuum of thought leadership with a strategic focus and thought leadership with a transformation focus

Note: the figure only considers the challenges of private and for-profit organisations to merge a strategic and transformation focus. In future research and dialogues with our knowledge members and partners, we should consider what these challenges are like for non-profit and public organisations.

the previously mentioned consulting companies like McKinsey & Company, the Boston Consulting Group and Bain & Company are plotted. They traditionally embrace a positioning focus on thought leadership, which is logical because intellect and expertise are actually the products they offer their clients. On the right side of the continuum, companies are added that are mostly transformation focused, the social entrepreneurs of our time such as Tony Chocolonely, Tesla or even Patagonia (an American outdoor apparel firm that has inspired and convinced many other entrepreneurs that it is possible to build a successful company that places the environment at the heart of its business). Their focus breeds revolution. At the same time, they do acknowledge the importance of being recognised as thought leaders, which helps them to boost their brand and competitive positioning. At the middle of the continuum, examples of companies are placed whose strategies seem to embrace both types of logic. Some of them may lean more toward the strategic logic of thought leadership, some of them to the transformational logic, but what characterises these companies is that they not only contribute to transformations in the economy and society by triggering new ways of thinking among stakeholders, they have also clearly shifted their positioning strategy to one that is based on this contribution, and the innovative body of thought on which this contribution in turn is based.

Earlier, I discussed how IBM's positioning strategy provided novel viewpoints and convention-challenging solutions to complex societal issues that their stakeholders are facing (water management, city infrastructure). Philips is another company in which you see both views on thought leadership combined. With Philips' new strategic focus on becoming the leading company in the health and well-being market, its ambition is to improve people's lives with meaningful innovations. To strengthen its positioning on this theme, in 2009 Philips started the Center for Health & Well-Being, a knowledge-sharing forum that aims to advance two important societal themes: 1) 'Liveable Cities' in a society where more than 50% of the world population lives in big cities and which is expected to surpass 66% by 2015 (United Nations, 2014) and 2) 'Aging Well' in a society where an ageing population is leading to an increase in chronic conditions and therefore healthcare costs. The center conducted research, shared the insights through various publications

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*The Dutch School of Thought  
stands for a blended vision  
on thought leadership:  
positioning and transformation  
go hand in hand.*

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and (online) channels and brought together experts and other parties for dialogue designed to overcome barriers and identify possible solutions for meaningful change that can improve people's overall health and well-being (Hartley, 2011).

Business goals and societal goals are dependent upon one another, and by this same token, both types of logic on thought leadership should also go hand-in-hand a lot more frequently. This blended vision on thought leadership is at the heart of what we call the Dutch School of Thought. With this vision, we are explicitly setting ourselves apart from the most common view that is economic in nature, and whereby thought leadership is primarily a way to elevate your marketing strategy to a higher level or to assert the title of 'thought leader'. Only a business view on thought leadership is problematic as it ignores the transformative landscape that we are in and the mounting expectations set by stakeholders to be a positive force in these changes. We also distance ourselves from a purely transformation focus without involving the competitive landscape in which a company operates. A strictly revolutionary understanding of thought leadership without appreciating a positioning focus is an artificial demarcation of our reality, simply because organisations have to survive in an increasingly more competitive landscape (see box 4). We need both types of logic. We also need leaders, managers and communication professionals who challenge their organisations to embrace both types of logic.

When it comes to communication professionals, this means taking a different view on how we train and educate them. They should be able to see the bigger picture, to balance sound management with social purpose and to operate in, and contribute to, a space that expands conventional ways of thinking and acting. They should be trained as contributors to instigating paradigm shifts, by their competence in imagining, shaping and expressing new realities, as well as living up to them. The combination of these capacities gives future communication professionals with these skills enormous leverage. In the next chapter, I describe how the lectorate and the Dutch School of Thought try to achieve this goal.

○ BOX 4:

*FrieslandCampina –thought leader on important sustainability issues*

By 2009, FrieslandCampina, the Dutch dairy cooperative of more than 19,000 farmers, saw its market and societal landscape changing and realized that it had to reposition itself to ensure its future legitimacy. The company, a merger of two mid-size dairy cooperatives, was facing several challenges. Fed by several outspoken opinion leaders, the idea had grown that milk was unhealthy and that we can easily thrive without it. 'It was clear that we needed to tell our story better and show that we are growing with the new *zeitgeist*, not against it,' according to Sustainability and Corporate Communications Director Van Ooijen. On a national level, the dairy sector makes a significant contribution to the Dutch economy, but ministers and governments had little or no knowledge about the industry. Furthermore, top talent was hard to attract; candidates did not see FrieslandCampina as an attractive employer. Globally, society is facing daunting challenges. The world population is expected to grow to 9 billion people by 2050, 70% of who will live in cities. Feeding this growing urban population will stretch the world's resources far beyond the current levels (FrieslandCampina, 2014). With FrieslandCampina's products and expertise, it can contribute to taking on these global challenges. 'However, to do so,' says Van Ooijen, 'we clearly needed to embark on a transition to a new era.'

In 2010, FrieslandCampina reformulated its vision and launched its route2020 strategy in which it sets clear goals on sustainable growth for the company, its cooperative farmers and society as a whole. The company changed its business model, restructured its organisation and ensured its 19,000 farmers would commit to route2020. Van Ooijen: 'We told our farmers: "if you want to be on board, you need to make some fundamental changes in your business. You have to prioritize outdoor grazing, the health and wellness of your animals, climate-neutral production and so forth. We will support you and reward you for it, but you will also be held accountable for it."'

An instrumental part of this strategy was to change stakeholders' mindsets about the economic, nutritional and social importance of dairy products. The company started to share research and insights on how milk is produced and why it is nutritious *by nature*. It launched a new platform, [www.milkstory.nl](http://www.milkstory.nl), that highlights several major challenges the dairy industry faces in terms of health, sustainability and the global food problem. Through open and independent dialogue, The Milk Story aims to contribute to the transition to a more sustainable future.

Other initiatives have since been launched, such as co-organizing important events with healthcare professionals, schools, doctors and policy-makers. These initiatives not only changed the mindset of FrieslandCampina's 19,000 farmers and employees, increasing their sense of pride about the products they make, but doctors, healthcare professionals, ministers, and the more serious national media also gradually began to embrace FrieslandCampina's viewpoints. 'Some of the ministers who initially explicitly opposed us have changed their mind, and are now making an active contribution to the transition to a more sustainable future,' Van Ooijen says. Over a period of five years, FrieslandCampina has gone from two mid-size dairy cooperatives to a progressive, innovative entrepreneur, viewed by many stakeholders as a thought leader on important sustainability issues, both in of the sense of 'thought' and 'leadership'. This viewpoint was also mirrored by the Dutch government in 2014 when it gave FrieslandCampina the prestigious King Willem I award, reflecting the public acknowledgement of the contribution the company makes to the Dutch economy and society. The award recognizes good business practices, entrepreneurial spirit, decisiveness, sustainability, commitment and perseverance.

## 5 | The ambitions of Dutch School of Thought



On an international level, we aim to get a movement of people started that, via creating and sharing knowledge, focuses on developing thought leadership to become a substantively meaningful and pioneering positioning strategy. A movement that presents the earlier described vision on thought leadership that we labeled as Dutch School of Thought.

In order to get the Dutch School of Thought movement started, the lectorate will have to take shape according to the concept of a 'knowledge haven' (Ossewold, 2015) that ensures that researchers, organisations, professors, students, communications professionals, entrepreneurs, knowledge institutes and others sharing our ideology are connected to one another and are able to (co-)develop and share knowledge and make it productive. With this idea of a 'knowledge haven', we are mirroring ourselves on the ambitions of the Fontys School of Communication to expand the educational institution, making it a learning community:

*'a learning culture [...] in which the members create knowledge, but mostly also circulate it, validate it and make it productive. The Learning Community is larger than the institution. It covers a widespread and varied network, with borders that are vague and changeable, but in which the pivotal role of the institute of applied sciences is clearly visible.'* (Eckringa, 2014).

Much like the learning community is larger than the institution, the knowledge haven will also be larger than the lectorate. The knowledge haven will bring together people from different areas to assign collective meaning to thought leadership.

As a knowledge haven, we will therefore focus on the two spearheads, described in the paragraphs below.

## 5.1 Spearhead one: applied research along three lines

In order to ensure that the Dutch School of Thought evolves into a meaningful and pioneering body of ideas, we will develop knowledge along three lines of research. These are described in the paragraphs below.

### 5.1.1 How organisations contribute to shifting paradigms and societal transitions

- We know little about how organisations contribute to shifting paradigms. How do organisations articulate and share their novel viewpoints and build up understanding and trust among stakeholders - employees in the first place? How do they get employees to see the bigger picture and how do they get them involved? What kind of engagement tools work well (see box 5)? How do they connect with other partners and build eco-systems of innovative thinkers and doers and how will this create ripple effects in spreading novel ways of thinking? In these processes, what are the critical moments, which organisations are able to realise small tipping points in stakeholders' understanding, acceptance and endorsement of their viewpoints? What are the factors contributing to these tipping points? These are all questions that require more insight and thus more research.

We should also gain more insight into how organisations strike a balance between their current and future realities and how they make everyday choices within this context of tension. As Sustainability Director at Unilever Benelux, Anniek Mauser, explains: 'We are stretching our sustainability strategy as far as we can, but for some people, it is never enough.' Indeed, her statement reflects the concern shared by many other organisations that know that organisational realities are often more complex than outsiders may notice at first glance. Organisations may be truly committed to change, but may sometimes still need to make decisions that seem to slow down, or undermine, the future reality that they embrace. The simple reason for this is that organisations truly committed to a new future reality also have to deal with their current reality in which they need to balance the interests of many different and powerful stakeholders on which they depend on to survive. This is why thought leading organisations continuously need to balance, explain, rationalise

○ BOX 5:

*Involving employees in Unilever's Sustainable Living plan*

To involve employees in Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan, Unilever enlisted a European online gaming tool ('brightFuture in Action') which is now running for the third year in a row. Anniek Mauser, Director Sustainability for the Benelux: 'We have a very ambitious Unilever Sustainable Living Plan, a visionary CEO, but this doesn't mean all employees will understand overnight what this means for the business and for them personally, both in their daily jobs as well as in their private lives. brightFuture in Action has helped me to getting sustainability to touch down, to engage people, to share their ideas, to give them action perspectives and to get in gear themselves.'

The program runs for six weeks, six sustainability themes, each consisting of three parts: Learn (employees can learn or refresh their knowledge about the Unilever Sustainability Plan), Act (employees are given several tools to help them kick-start integration in their daily jobs) and Share (employees can share their wishes, needs, ideas, and frustrations on the various issues).

The results of brightFuture in Action 2014 were encouraging: 6000 colleagues were invited to participate, 75% of whom did. 92% said that the game has given them extra knowledge about sustainability within Unilever. 66% indicated that the game made them think differently about the strategy, and 62% said it has changed one or more of their behaviours at work.

*Source: case description of Snowball & Flywheels, the company developing the game tool; <http://snowfly.nl/en/project/unilever-en/>*

and justify decisions. Sometimes, these decisions are in favour of their future reality, whilst at others, they need to act in a way that is aligned with their current reality. We can learn a lot more from how organisations deal with such challenges.

If we, practitioners, scholars and lecturers, are to embrace thought leadership as a serious positioning strategy in a changing society, it is important that we equip ourselves with a more systematic understanding of how forerunners have dealt with the issues mentioned above, as these are the issues that thought leaders come across and need to deal with. The Dutch School of Thought will be examining these questions through case-study research. By doing so, we can delve deeply into exemplary cases of thought leadership and create a better practitioner understanding of how the above-described dynamics underlying the shifting of paradigms play out, and how organisations combine transformation purposes with positioning goals. In doing so, we aim to offer professionals in our field process models and frameworks that may help them to better interpret, systematically understand and more fully appreciate the challenges of their own thought-leading processes. Also, using these case studies based on real-life examples, we hope to give practitioners confidence and inspiration to think and act outside of their comfort zones.

### **5.1.2 How novel points of view trigger new ways of thinking, and ultimately contribute to the shifting of paradigms**

If we are interested in how organisations can contribute to shifting paradigms, or more specifically, how their articulated viewpoints can trigger new ways of thinking amongst key stakeholders, then we need to better identify the mechanisms that enable these ‘mind triggering effects’. Triggering new ways of thinking amongst key stakeholders is, just as are many of our communicative attempts, an act of ‘sensegiving’: ‘a process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of [...] reality (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442).’ As Maitlis and Lawrence (2007, p. 57) explain, ‘sensegiving is an interpretive process in which actors influence each other through persuasive or evocative language, and it is used both by organisational

leaders and other stakeholders, including middle managers, directors and other employees.’ Sensegiving goes through various practices, such as through evocative language, symbolism but also through a company’s substantive actions that demonstrate how they give shape to the new reality.

To study the impact of sensegiving on the realisation of shifting paradigms, I have developed a conceptual framework which is depicted in Figure 3. Overall, the model assumes that articulated *novel points of view* (the left box in the figure) trigger new ways of thinking; a process that is depicted by the horizontal arrow. I assume that this process of *sensemaking* is of crucial importance in achieving paradigm shifts. While it may be hard to assess the real occurrence of a paradigm shift (whether this is on an individual, group or societal level), the framework assumes that the occurrence of paradigm shifts may be indicated by the degree to which people’s understanding, acceptance and support for potential future realities has grown. The framework also reflects the notion that sensemaking processes are largely influenced by various *sensegiving practices* in the form of both language and substantive behaviour (depicted in the upper and lower box in the framework). It is the combined effect of novel viewpoints and sensegiving practices that can allow organisations to contribute to changing paradigms. While the model is by no means comprehensive (the model for instance ignores the important societal, political or economic dimensions that may contribute to the shifting of paradigms in a society of change), it serves as a good point of departure to study how organisations can contribute to paradigm shifts. I will explain each box in the framework in more detail below.

### **The role of novel points of view in shifting paradigms**

Sensegiving with regard to the future reality starts with articulating a novel viewpoint that challenges people’s thinking about the status quo and triggers new ways of thinking. A novel point of view is basically a ‘frame’ through which we look at the world. Frames can be defined as ‘internal structure[s] of the mind (Kinder & Sanders, 1990: 74)’, or ‘cognitive devices (Scheufele, 1999: 107)’ that offer us a particular angle through which we observe and interpret the world around us. If the par-

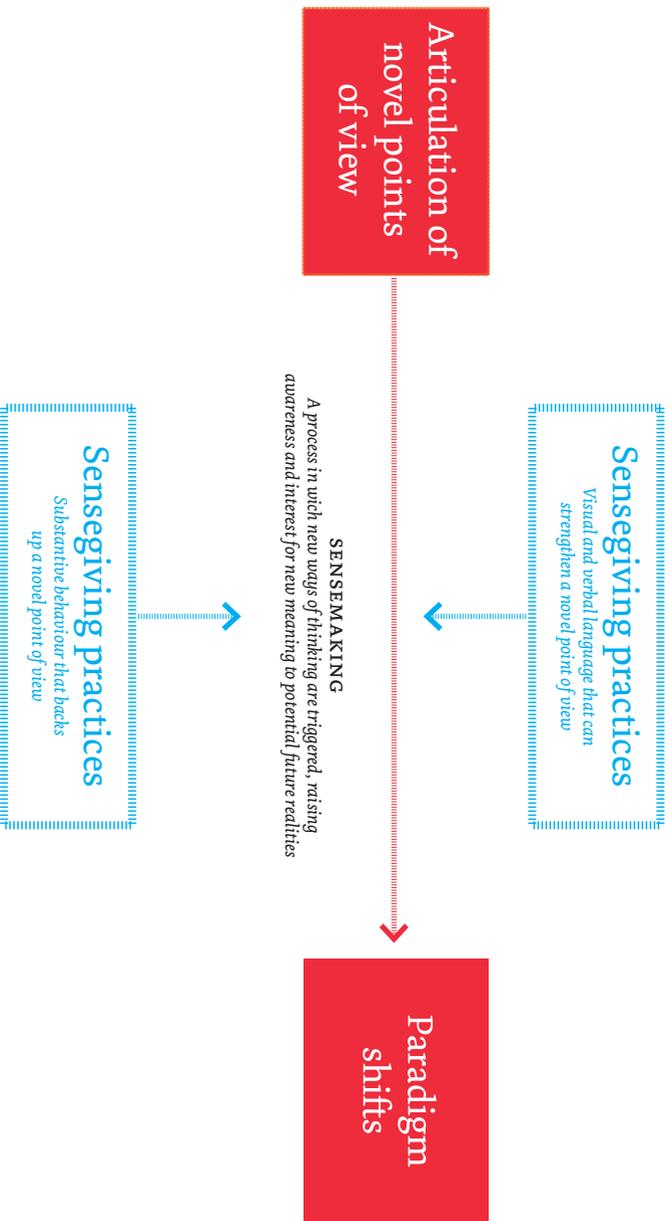


Figure 3 Research framework: how organisations' novel points of view may contribute to paradigm shifts

ticular frame through which we look at our world is different from those of our audiences, we refer to this as having a novel point of view. Thus, by articulating our novel point of view, we basically ask our audience to look at the world through our frame, and to alter their perceived social reality (see box 6 for an illustration of how ManpowerGroup articulates its novel viewpoints). So, if sensegiving is an attempt to influence the meaning structure of others, then a well-crafted novel point of view can, in itself, be a strong form of sensegiving. The irony, however, is that too few leaders think about developing points of view (Murray, 2012, p. 136).

Therefore, in order to equip leaders with ways to better express their points of view, we should focus more on trying to understand the different working mechanisms in which novel points of view can impact the sensegiving process. The typology in Table 1 may give us a first clue into the different types of novel points of view that can be identified and their underlying working mechanisms. It should be said however that the typology is far from exhaustive or comprehensive. You will notice that some novel points of view may be characterised by more than one working mechanism. Dove's novel point of view on beauty, for instance, may contain both frame-cracking and frame-expanding working mechanisms. While the typology is not exhaustive, we will use it as a starting point in our applied research to examine how different types of novel points of view can trigger people's thinking about important themes in society.

### **The role of language in shifting paradigms**

Novel points of view never work alone. The impact of novel points of view is amplified by means of all sorts of 'sensegiving practices' - evocative language in the form of rhetoric, metaphors and linguistic or visual symbols (stories, logos, animations, icons, slogans, pay-offs, neologisms).

As communication specialists, we are generally aware of the subtle yet significant positive or negative impact that these linguistic and visual sensegiving enablers can have in getting the essence of our message across. Yet, we often do not really realise the impact they have on triggering new ways of thinking. Nor are we able to explain why they have the impact they have. This is an important gap in our practitioner-expertise since in order for communication specialists to build new

○ BOX 6:

*ManpowerGroup - 'A new era is upon us: The Human Age'*

ManpowerGroup is pursuing a thought leadership strategy that is very much worth following. Through its 'Human Age' viewpoint it is clearly seeking to change existing paradigms in its sector as well as society about what we need for our economy and society to prosper. The company's point of view is that capital and technology are not enough to grow our economy worldwide. Paradoxically, due to the upsurge of computers and robots, it is the *human* talent (people's knowledge, skills, creativity and inventiveness) which is becoming increasingly more important. With this viewpoint, ManpowerGroup invites stakeholders to the Human Age. What they observe is that the world, and particularly employers, are struggling to define this new age. ManpowerGroup is therefore contributing to the defining of this new era by offering novel viewpoints, insights and innovative workforce solutions for employers, governmental leaders and other interested parties on how to navigate the Human Age.

The company has defined four trends that characterise the transition to the Human Age: individual choice (the ability to work anywhere, anytime), customer sophistication (consumers are becoming smarter and more demanding), talent mismatch (there is not a shortage of people, but a shortage of the right skills) and technological revolutions (leading to transparency that is driving everything all over the world) (ManpowerGroup, 2015). Joyce Oomen, Director of Thought Leadership and Innovation at ManpowerGroup the Netherlands:

*"The speed at which these changes are occurring is difficult to predict; the only certainty that we have is uncertainty. A complex world that demands speed, creativity and inventive capabilities. A world that demands talent. Talent doesn't think the same way about work. Talent doesn't want a job, it wants to grow and make a difference. In the world of talent, there is no hierarchy, no distinction between work and private life. Talent is always online and connected with other talent and....collaboration is the new form of employment."*

TYPES OF NPOV	DESCRIPTION	PRACTICAL EXAMPLES
Blending	A NPOV that argues that two seemingly opposing constructs should not be seen as either/or but both/and.	Unilever's NPOV is packaged in its vision: 'double the size of the business while reducing our environmental footprint and increasing our positive social impact'. While 'profits' and 'social' were traditionally two opposing constructs, Unilever clearly speaks out about a vision in which a 'both/and' mentality is possible. They blend two seemingly opposing frames.
Turning	A NPOV that asks its audience to see their perceived reality in terms of one specific viewpoint, while attenuating others.	IBM asks its stakeholders to stop focusing on smaller parts of the bigger problems: building a new bridge, broadening a road, putting up traffic signs. Instead, we should focus on the relationships within the whole system and all related systems: the supply chains, the environment, etc.  Manpower makes the case that capital and technology are not enough to grow our economy worldwide. Paradoxically, due to the upsurge of computers and robots, it is the human talent (people's knowledge, skills, creativity and inventiveness) which is becoming increasingly more important.
Expanding	A NPOV that asks us to broaden our perception on a certain theme	Dove challenges our narrow perception of beauty and encourages its stakeholders to broaden their definition of it.
Cracking	A NPOV that makes us aware and aims to 'crack' or break down, biased or even immoral worldviews that are taken for granted	Dove's motto 'Our perception of beauty is distorted' was an attempt to 'crack' the biased perceptions of beauty that are taken for granted.  Tony Chocolonely challenges the taken-for-granted assumption in its industry that 100% slave-labour free chocolate is impossible.
Re-invigorating	A NPOV that re-invigorates perceptions about themes that have been taken for granted so often that people have come to see them as irrelevant.	FrieslandCampina has returned the nutritious value of milk as well as the importance of the Dutch dairy sector back to the mindset of many different stakeholders such as ministers, doctors, healthcare professionals, schools and parents.

*Table 1: A typology of novel points of view (NPOVs) and their working mechanisms*

The company also defines several shifts that characterise the transition to the Human Age , as shown in the figure.

By offering these different viewpoints on the Human Age, ManpowerGroup is clearly triggering new ways of thinking and contributing to new worldviews in its sector and society as a whole.

## 20 Epic Shifts to the Human Age

YESTERDAY	TOMORROW
Industrial/Information Ages	The Human Age
Capitalism	Talentism
Access to capital the differentiator	Access to talent the differentiator
Driven by owners and companies	Driven by skilled individuals
Workers chasing companies	Companies chasing workers
Companies dictate terms	Employees dictate terms
Workers living near (or from) place of work	Workers living (or from) anywhere
Talent glut	Talent shortage
Unemployment from over-supply	Unemployment from specific demand
Technology the enslaver	Technology the liberator
Closed borders	Open borders
Migration rare	Migration commonplace
Job for life	10-14 jobs by age 38
Corporate opacity; secretiveness	Corporate transparency; openness, human approach
OECD countries growing and dominant	Non-OECD countries growing and dominant BRIC-MIST, especially China, India, Africa
Work for an organization	Work with an organization
Be lean and mean	Look out, not in
Size matters	Agility matters
Hire power	Hire passion
Command and control	Flexible frameworks

Source: adapted from a figure of ManpowerGroup

realities, we need to have a better understanding of the working mechanisms and impacts of the sensegiving practices we apply. We need mental tools we can use to test our intuition about the impact of our communication mechanisms. This is why, at the Dutch School of Thought, we will augment practitioners' understanding of the role and impact of different forms of verbal and visual language on shifting paradigms.

### **The role of substantive actions in shifting paradigm**

The use of evocative language is merely one side of the coin when it comes to getting internal and external stakeholders to understand, accept and support the new way of thinking, and the new reality. The other side has to do with generating trustworthy behaviour. Companies must demonstrate that they are acting in line with their novel points of view (van Halderen, et al., 2013). This means that companies need to work on substantive behaviour that makes the future reality-to-be concrete, in a step-by-step fashion. Organisational actions that back up the novel point of view are therefore critical sensegiving practices that we cannot overlook when studying how organisations can gain stakeholders' understanding, acceptance and support for their new realities.

### **5.1.3 How to measure thought leadership impacts**

If we are to embrace thought leadership as both a positioning strategy as well as a transformation strategy focused on the shifting of paradigms, we must also develop measurement systems that integrate these two approaches. To the extent that practitioners measure their thought leadership effects, they still tend to focus on the positioning impacts rather than the paradigm-shifting aspects. I am convinced that it is only a matter of time before stakeholders start asking for metrics that offer insight into how much the organisation's thought leading strategy has contributed to changing paradigms amongst stakeholders and within society.

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To develop such measures, we can start by collecting and learning from how different practitioners are already assessing the impact of their novel viewpoints on stakeholders' mindsets (their employees, to start with). This is frequently assessed qualitatively. FrieslandCampina, for instance, observed over time how the United Nations, a very important stake-

holder, has increasingly started to publicly endorse dairy products as a provider of key nutritious elements. The Dutch cleaning company Asito embraces the connecting of different cultures as its societal spearhead. It has been working with Leiden University to develop a measuring tool that can assess the degree to which their annual National Integration Dinners actually contribute to stronger cultural connections in Dutch society (Welsing, 2015). By collecting these types of measurements, we offer practitioners an array of ways to think about how to measure their thought leadership goals. It may also make communication professionals more aware of the fact that the effects of thought leadership may already be found in subtle aspects that are often overlooked yet which can be significant catalysts in their paradigm-shifting process. Given that it is often difficult for communications professionals to justify their communication budgets and activities, collecting these kinds of measurements may support practitioners in their attempts to account for and justify their thought leading efforts.

While many practitioners may assess their thought leadership efforts on the basis of their positioning goals, they do so by asking audiences about the degree to which they think the company is a 'thought leader'. This is an overly superficial and inadequate way of measuring your thought leadership efforts as it does not explain how the viewpoints a company expresses have triggered stakeholders' new way of thinking. Moreover, it assumes that stakeholders have a common understanding of what thought leadership is, while this is hardly the case. Thought leadership is still interpreted in all too many ways and often (embarrassingly) easily equated with content marketing. This is why we need underlying items that explain our perception of thought leadership. I believe that these items should focus on the degree to which the company is known for its thought-provoking viewpoints, for triggering stakeholders' transformational thinking, for contesting existing societal discourses and for getting stakeholders to understand, accept and support their alternatively articulated worldviews. The Dutch School of Thought is committed to developing just such a measurement construct which practitioners may apply in practice.

## 5.2 Spearhead 2: Share and engage

In order to get a movement of people started that focuses on developing thought leadership to become an intrinsically meaningful and pioneering strategy, we will have to connect people on the basis of the idea of a knowledge haven. To do so, we focus on both the internal and external side of the Fontys School of Communication learning community. Internally, the thought leadership lectorate is committed to contributing to the vision of our school to deliver outstanding and pioneering education to students who are the future contributors to our rapidly changing world (Ruyters, 2015). Externally, we will have to share and connect with our practitioners in the field as well as researchers and lecturers from other knowledge institutions. In doing so, our work takes on an international scope.

### 5.2.1 Share and engage with our students and colleagues

A few examples of how the lectorate and the Dutch School of Thought aim to engage students and colleagues and share knowledge and expertise follow below.

**Minor module thought leadership** The aim of this minor module is to educate students as communication professionals who can support organisations to instigate paradigm shifts by developing and expressing novel viewpoints as well as living up to them. We stimulate them to experiment with different ways of thinking and paradigm shifting by creating novel points of view for organisations. Students experience what thought leadership is, why it is relevant, what it offers organisations and society, and how thought leadership strategies are developed. The course blends theory with practice. Companies like KPN, ManpowerGroup, Tony Chocolonely and Aegon present their thought leadership cases and challenges and practitioners in the field share their thought leadership experiences.

**Gallery of Thoughts project** The aim of the Gallery of Thoughts project is for students to learn to imagine, shape and express new realities. They use their creative skills to envision a future societal reality and propose how organisations may position themselves vis-à-vis these future realities

- (see box 7). The Gallery of Thoughts project is one of the ways in which the lectorate aims to contribute to educating students as ‘thinking actors and acting thinkers (Ossewold, 2015)’. Each year, the best students are invited to present their work during a walk-through exposition (‘The Gallery of Thoughts’) at one of the lectorate’s events, and to publish their work on the Dutch School of Thought’s online platform.

**Trending topics** The goal of having students writing trending topics is to stimulate their analytic, argumentative and reflective competencies. Students who show potentially outstanding trending topics with a focus on thought leadership can work with the lectorate to push their knowledge and skills to a higher theoretical and professional level. Trending topics are accessible as articles on the Dutch School of Thought’s online platform.

**Students working as junior applied researchers** The purpose of training students as junior researchers is to be able to create a theoretical and empirical foundation for their intuition and hunches. Students can contribute to our case studies and simultaneously incorporate this in their school projects.

**An international Master’s degree** The goal of developing an international Master’s degree on thought leadership is to give shape to the learning community of Fontys School of Communication as well as the Dutch School of Thought’s international movement of practitioners – students, lecturers, researchers, leaders, managers, employees and advisers.

## ○ BOX 7

### *KPN and the New Way of Living and Working*

The New way of Living and Working is about much more than simply working from home. For KPN, working at home is the old paradigm. The new paradigm refers to a society in which virtual and physical life are thoroughly integrated, resulting in a huge impact on the productivity of labour and quality of life (Paulis, 2015). Marco van Gelder, Program Manager for KPN's The New Way of Living and Working: 'The reality is that management paradigms do not work anymore in our new society and we need to find new ones, designed on the basis of employees' autonomous positions.' Old concepts like hierarchy, fixed work, fixed devices, and focusing on employee attendance make way for newer ones such as flat organisations, the cloud, bring-your-own devices, and focusing on output instead of employee attendance.

Our existing technological possibilities to make this future reality concrete are, however, still underutilised. KPN sees it as its responsibility to further develop and implement the existing technology and to demonstrate the potential of this technology to the user. Not just its own employees, but also clients in the healthcare sector, logistics and so on. It also aims to give further substance to this new reality by facilitating dialogue about what the paradigm shift on The New way of Living and Working means for our behaviour, leadership skills, culture, and measuring productivity as well as a sustainable society.

As part of the Gallery of Thoughts project, Fontys School of Communication students have worked with KPN to give further shape to this new reality. They have specifically focused on the younger generation's New way of Living and Working and formulated the novel point of view that our societal view on achieving excellence (being outstanding or extremely good) is distorted and excessively dictated by old norms and values: if you have highly regarded college degrees and get hired by well-respected companies, you have 'done well'. This way of thinking is strongly tied to achieving societal status while marginalising what you find important about yourself. It increasingly alienates today's young professionals. Excellence should be about self-determination,

autonomy and, based on these values, being of outstanding value. To achieve this new mentality, the students propose six turning points in our thinking about excellence (see their Gallery of Thoughts file on [www.dutchschoolofthought.com](http://www.dutchschoolofthought.com)). They have made their Novel Point of View concrete in a Life Portfolio, which should be an addition to our traditional CV. To further advance the dialogue on this theme, the students propose the KPN Centre for Future Life – a focal point for sharing knowledge and ideas by researchers, opinion leaders and practitioners.

## 5.2.2 Share and engage with practitioners in the field

To act as a knowledge haven with an international scope, we are sharing knowledge and expertise and engaging practitioners in various ways.

### **Sharing our research, knowledge and ideas**

*Knowledge portal [www.dutchschoolofthought.com](http://www.dutchschoolofthought.com)* The virtual platform provides practitioners with the most recent knowledge, developments and activities in the area of thought leadership. It is a portal where practitioners share and interact with each other to further advance knowledge, skills and ideas on thought leadership.

*High Thoughts Seminars* Each year, we organise the High Thoughts Seminar where we invite our knowledge partners, members and other stakeholders to share recent knowledge products, and discuss future (research) topics for potential collaboration.

*Conferences and Seminars* One rather obvious way we will engage practitioners is by attending national and international conferences as well as seminars.

*Publications* We also publish in practitioners' or academic journals or books, and through the previously described case studies, trending topics or blogs (for a current collection of publications, please refer to our knowledge portal). Finally, we seek to capitalise on the dialogue on current issues in the news.

### **Engaging with partners and members**

*With knowledge partners* We are constantly seeking knowledge partners who are eager to collaborate with the Dutch School of Thought. Knowledge partners enable us to commit to longer-term research projects whereby the funding can come from both parties and/or via research tenders.

*With knowledge members* We have an active and inspiring relationship with our knowledge members with whom we share practical insights, invite to be guest lecturers and seek other forms of inspirational dialogue and engagement.

## 6 | Closing

There are many times that we as individuals have to realise, or even admit, as painful as it may be, that our behaviour, our way of life has been dictated too much by ingrained schema and patterns in our mind. For as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by how we as people choose (or do not choose) to break away from ingrained thinking, once this starts to present a hindrance to us in our lives. What intrigues me most in all of this are the cognitive-psychological processes lying underneath.

Since I started my work as a researcher, I began to link this fascination to what I observed at companies. I started to analyse companies that openly challenge ingrained ways of thinking and propose alternative viewpoints. I realised the strong connection between the cognitive-psychological and communicative elements here. I then came in contact with the term 'thought leading', or perhaps 'leading by thought'. By that time the term was not yet as popular as it tends to be nowadays. The term reflected what I had been studying for quite some time: companies daring to break away from the status quo by openly speaking up about their viewpoints and committing to transforming ways of thinking and acting. I was not studying innovative market disruptors here, whose focus lies mainly on disruption by products. I was interested in disruption by thought, by language, and by actions.

I am convinced that we should focus more closely on the role of organisations in breaking away from established thoughts and behaviour in our society. I am convinced that by having such a thought-provoking purpose, companies also sharpen their internal focus and inspiration.

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I have set the ambitions for the lectorate thought leadership high. The ideas that I introduced here are certainly not yet crystal clear and require more research to put flesh to their bones. I realise that we have a lot of work yet to do to achieve our goals. However, I do not apologise to people who think that our ambitions are too high. In order to achieve them, we need commitment. Commitment in terms of belief, spirit, perseverance and, very practically, in terms of budget and other resources.

I am pleased that the Fontys School of Communication sees so much potential in the ideas behind thought leadership. And I am honoured that the school has given me the opportunity to give shape to all of this and to set up the Dutch School of Thought. It is the best job that I could have imagined at this point in my career, and the further advancement of thought leadership is something that is near and dear to me.

I hope that I have been able to inspire you and trigger your thinking about thought leadership. Most of all, I sincerely hope that I am mobilising some of you to connect with us and discuss future collaboration.

## 7 | A word of thanks

Since the start of the lectorate I have worked with many people who have made the launch of the lectorate and the Dutch School of Thought possible.

First, I want to thank my colleague Berly Walraven who, before I was even applying for the position as lector, had the vision at Fontys School of Communication to set up a lectorate dedicated to thought leadership. Berly, I admire your outlook, your pragmatic way of working, your 'can-do' mentality, your perseverance and especially your habit of not shying away from difficult or uncomfortable issues. Your role as Director of Business Operations at the Dutch School of Thought really suits you.

I also particularly want to thank Patrick Eckringa, Director of Fontys School of Communication. Your belief in and continuous support for our plans have been tremendously important to me. I am appreciative of your continuing support and at the same time down-to-earth and sound management advice. I have come to know you as a truly pleasant immediate supervisor and colleague to work with.

I would like to thank the Executive Board of Fontys University of Applied Sciences for my appointment as lector (associate professor) and for the trust they have placed in our school and me to make this lectorate and the Dutch School of Thought happen.

Many thanks also go to emeritus lector and strategic adviser Jurriënne Ossewold, who played a very special role during the last year of my professional life. Jurriënne, many of our ideas for the Dutch School of Thought were influenced by your mind and spirit. Your creative mind is unique. You connect the dots in a magical way, generating concepts that others could not have imagined. On a personal level, you have encouraged me to keep capitalising on my strengths, while also gaining a better understanding of my weaknesses. Our minds and personalities found each other quickly. I hope many more fruitful things will come of our still new relationship.

I thank my dear colleagues at Fontys University of Applied Sciences, especially those I have had the privilege of working with in shaping the lectorate and the Dutch School of Thought. A special thanks also goes to the lecturer team of the thought leadership minor-module as well as our great support team. In particular Wendy Coolen, Yvonne Lemmen-Van Kemmenade and Studio van Laar who have worked very hard to make this event happen.

I would also like to extend a thank-you to my students at Fontys School of Communication, who have truly inspired me with their creative, imaginative and refreshing ways of thinking and acting. Your enthusiasm about thought leadership fuels my energy.

Finally, a heartfelt thanks to my family. Special honours go to my parents and parents-in-law who give us the unconditional support we need in juggling career and a family with young children. It is largely thanks to you that we can fly. And to close, my gratitude and deep respect goes to my life partner Stefan, who is the real model of new ways of thinking and embarking on unusual paths. Stefan, together with our precious children, I look forward to how we will again find new ways of living and working, incorporating our values as people and a family.

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# Curriculum Vitae

Mignon van Halderen has since 2014 been lector (associate professor) Thought Leadership in a Society of Change at Fontys University of Applied Sciences, School of Communication Eindhoven, the Netherlands. She is the founding director of the Dutch School of Thought, the international research institute affiliated with the Lectorate, Thought Leadership in a Society of Change. The lectorate and research institute play a crucial, connecting role between research, education and practice. Mignon van Halderen advises organisations on thought leadership via her consulting agency, Leading Thoughts ([www.leading-thoughts.com](http://www.leading-thoughts.com)).

She has extensive experience in academic and applied research, and has been active in the field of thought leadership for many years. She earned her PhD at the Rotterdam School of Management (RSM), Erasmus University where she conducted research on major oil companies' positioning strategies with respect to climate change. She continued working for RSM, Erasmus University as an assistant professor until 2012. She still offers guest lectures and executive programmes on thought leadership for the International Executive Master of Corporate Communication at RSM, Erasmus University. Mignon is also active as a thesis supervisor for this executive programme.

Mignon van Halderen is the author of the book *Thought Leadership: vernieuwende inzichten op het snijvlak van markt en maatschappij* (Thought Leadership: innovative insights and value creation on the cutting edge of market and society), and has written various academic and practitioner articles on thought leadership and organisations' positioning challenges. She has published in various academic journals, including the *California Management Review*, *The Journal of Brand Management*, *The Journal of Business Ethics* and *The Corporate Reputation Review*. Over the last few years, she has developed the Thought Leadership Framework for developing a thought leadership strategy.



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# Publisher's imprint



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Design: Studio van Laar, Eindhoven

Editor: Allison Klein (ABK Translations)

Publisher: Fontys University of Applied Sciences  
Address: Rachelsmolen 1  
Building R4, first floor  
Postbox 347  
5600 AH Eindhoven, the Netherlands

Websites: [www.dutchschoolofthought.com](http://www.dutchschoolofthought.com)  
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