



‘GOOD’ LEADERS ALSO NEED ‘BAD’ SKILLS

The theme of this ILA annual conference focusses on leadership for good causes, like ‘inclusive leadership’ and ‘leadership for a healthy and sustainable human and planetary system’. It also states: ‘We are in a time of disjuncture, upheaval, unrest, and imbalance in all our social systems - education, health, economic, justice, and governance.’

In my view this sets the bar high for successful civil leadership, maybe too high. It places much more emphasis on ‘good’ character and ‘good’ causes leaders must show and pursue than on their necessary skills, attitudes and practical wisdom to get ‘good’ results. This is the dilemma between two definitions of good leadership: ‘good’ in a moral and societal meaning versus ‘good’ in terms of its effectiveness and results. In the end it is the classic tension, already put forward by Machiavelli, between wanting the best for society versus the political, even manipulative, skills to make that happen.

These questions are now further challenged because the public arena in which all leaders, public and private, must prove themselves and get recognition as leaders, has fundamentally changed. Leadership is defined by followers, not by academics. In democracies followers choose their leaders, more so than in corporate life and certainly than in dictatorships. These public battles have changed dramatically due to the Digital Civil Revolution, giving more power and influence to citizens, but also to the ones that can use and manipulate their now visible preferences. In the end these public battles not only show the vision of the people on public and political leadership, but will also influence their general opinion, in all contexts, about leadership. This new public arena emphasizes skills like rhetorics, theatrical skills, silent play of power games and manipulation of personal image (like showing yourself as ‘one-of-us’-citizens including emphasizing your personal biography and trying to gain sympathy as a ‘victim’). Do people who want more morally ‘good’ leadership want their proponents to have these ‘bad’ skills?

At the conference I certainly want to hear the views on these dilemmas and topics from my colleagues, both academics and practitioners.

There will be several opportunities, besides meeting in the walking- and drinking areas. There is a chance I will host a Round Table Discussion. I will certainly chair the workshop ‘Business leaders as a Force for Good in Society’ on Saturday. I will also be a host at the author meeting reception on Thursday.

Steven P.M. de Waal, PhD, is a strategic consultant, entrepreneur and chairman of multiple non-executive boards. He combines his extensive experience in the boardroom with research and academic reflection. He launched one of the first think tanks in the Netherlands, Public SPACE, which aims to stimulate active citizenship and social entrepreneurship. Dr. De Waal’s writing focuses on strategic thinking, practical wisdom for executives and social entrepreneurship. He has published many books and articles, and he has given numerous interviews and lectures for mainly executive audiences.

His dissertation (2014) conceptualized civil leadership and researched civil leaders’ values patterns in the different private-sector contexts. He was invited to lecture, and still lectures today, about his book ‘Civil Leadership as the Future of Leadership’ (2018) globally, from New Zealand, to Canada, Silicon Valley and many countries in Europe.

He launched one of the first think tanks in the Netherlands, Public SPACE, which aims to stimulate active citizenship and social entrepreneurship.

‘Civil Leadership as the Future of Leadership’ by Steven P.M. de Waal is available as e-book and paperback on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and in local (online) bookstores worldwide. A summary can be obtained at www.publicspace.eu

Publicspacefoundation.
Strategies for Public And Civil Entrepreneurs

