



Summary

Visie op publiek leiderschap: literature research

*Research report by the Leiden Leadership Centre (Leiden University)
commissioned by Bureau Algemene Bestuursdienst*

Bureau Algemene Bestuursdienst is working on a new view ('vision') on public leadership. The Leiden Leadership Centre (Leiden University) contributes to this process as academic partner. Between May 2021 and October 2021, researchers from the Leiden Leadership Centre (Leiden University) conducted literature research and empirical research. The results of this multifaceted research project provide an *evidence-base* for the new *Visie op publiek leiderschap*. This summary contains the main findings of the literature research.

Research objectives

The literature research shows the state of the art of (international) academic publications on public leadership. Its objective is threefold:

1. To map the latest academic insights on public leadership.
2. To juxtapose these insights with findings from the first version of the *Kompas voor ambtelijk leiderschap* (Frequin july 2021) and use them to recognize and substantiate key leadership elements and challenges.
3. To provide a theoretical framework for the empirical research.

Methodology

A multidimensional perspective on public leadership

The Leiden Leadership Centre (Leiden University) studies leadership as a **process and behavior**. Following this definition, leadership concerns characteristics of leaders as well as relationships and interactions. This calls for a multidimensional perspective involving formal leaders as well as other actors in leadership processes. The researchers specifically look at three directions in which leadership takes place: **inward, upward, and outward**. This distinction builds on Mark Moore's (1995) strategic triangle that focuses on the connection between public value, external legitimacy, and operational capacity.

A narrative approach

The researchers distinguish different perspectives in the literature. This narrative approach allows them to identify and interpret the most relevant insights, concepts and themes surrounding public leadership.

An underlying tension between public values

There is a tension between governance and accountability along hierarchical lines (vertical) and task-oriented collaboration across organizational boundaries (horizontal). Public leadership faces the challenge of **balancing between these two lines and thus navigating between public values**.

Results

The literature review shows that:

- there is no comprehensive and coherent academic field that outlines the content and scope of public leadership. The researchers thus also considered academic research that is not directly linked to leadership from different perspectives.
- there are **four dominant perspectives** on public leadership: the **crisis perspective, collaboration perspective, organizational perspective and organizational behavior perspective**. Each perspective has its own narrative. This narrative shows what leadership consists of, what it relates to and how it works.
- a combination of these perspectives is important for the development of (a vision on) (top) civil service leadership within the Rijksoverheid.

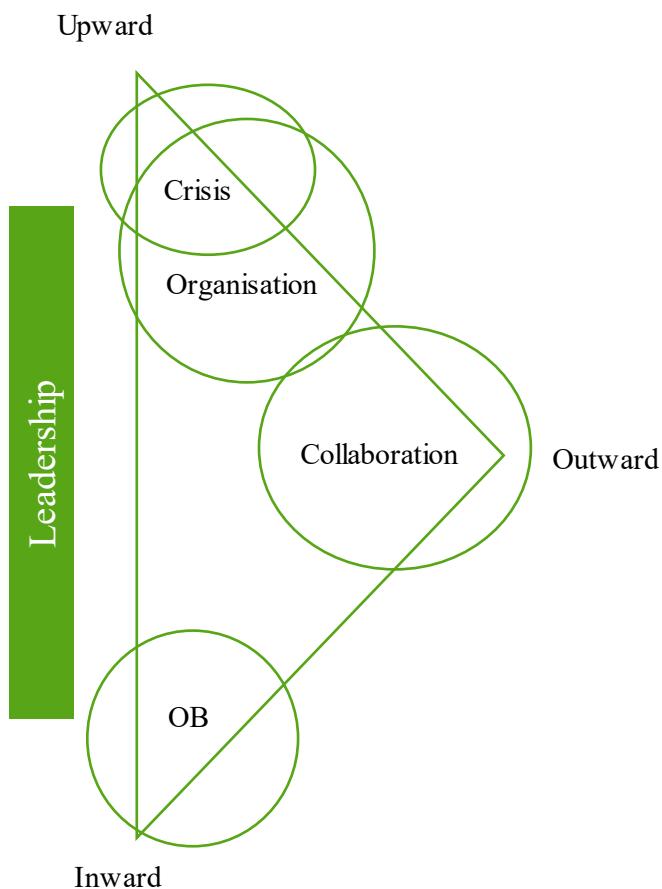


Figure 1. The perspectives relative to the directions of public leadership

Gaps and focal points

The researchers point to a number of blind spots in the academic literature:

- leadership literature is primarily 'leader-centric'. Perspectives on shared and distributed leadership are underrepresented. Moreover, there is still little discussion of the competencies needed to stimulate leadership in others.
- large societal challenges (including sustainability and digitalization) are hardly or not at all linked to leadership literature and vice versa.
- the effectiveness of specific leadership behaviors in public VUCA contexts has been little studied.
- leadership literature is primarily focused on positive outcomes and not on possible dark sides of leadership behaviors.

Finally, the Leiden Leadership Centre (Leiden University) shows how insights from academic literature (evidence-base) relate to findings from Mark Frequin's practice-based 'Quest for Public Leadership'. This connection between research and practice underlines the importance of a multidimensional perspective on public leadership.

Want to read more?

This report is the first deliverable of the Leiden Leadership Centre (Leiden University). The second deliverable is the empirical research report. Both reports are evidence-based sources for the new *Visie op publiek leiderschap* of Bureau Algemene Bestuursdienst. They also provide the groundwork for an essay that the Leiden Leadership Centre (Leiden University) will publish at the end of the research project. This essay will provide an academic reflection on the main leadership challenges in the Rijksoverheid.

Read more about this project on the [Algemene Bestuursdienst website](#).

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