

Servant-Leadership and Meaningful Work
Symposium

Room 2A-33 Main Building VU

Monday, 9 October 2017, 11.00-13.15 p.m.
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Now, more than ever, a leader's capacity to both direct an organisation and its people, while at the same time work in their service, is being recognized as a vital capacity for creating a sustainable organisation. Servant-leadership is a leadership principle embedded in a way of life, which has been recognized and expounded upon in all parts of the world throughout history, and across all cultures and communities. The recent economic crisis again reminds us of its importance as an antidote to the selfish and bonus-oriented behaviours we have witnessed and the economic/societal consequences we have seen.

The symposium *Servant-Leadership and Meaningful Work* is the 16th in an annual symposium series embedded in the Master course *Contemporary Careers and Organizations*. The symposium is a meeting place for students and professionals to strengthen the link between theory and business practice. This event goes beyond the cognitive approach to explore our inner strengths and meaning in work and life. Research shows that meaningful work supports employees job performance (Rodell, 2013) and customer satisfaction (Raub and Blunschi, 2014). However, creating an environment in which employees experience meaningfulness is not an easy thing to do nowadays. The current workplace is changing rapidly under the pressures of globalization, new technologies, and the economic uncertainty. Subsequently, leaders are challenged with the reality of short-term contracts and less face-to-face meetings. These flexible (nomadic) working conditions hinder people in building trusted long-term working communities in which they can invest. At the same time many employees have a calling and aspire interesting and valuable work. In this changing organizational context, where do employees find meaning and their intrinsic drive in their working life? How can leaders foster their talent growth? Servant-leadership is expressed in handling the anonymity and disruption of the 21st century (online) workplace. They help create a corporate social responsible culture where employees perceive their work as meaningful. For companies this implies matching individual and organisational needs while serving employees and society at large.

We are delighted this symposium brings together cutting-edge thinkers and practitioners across disciplines, leveraging the global human needs to learn, serve and lead in their unique way. Or like Ricardo Semler, champion of the employee-friendly radical corporate democracy and CEO of Semco Partners (www.semco.com) argues: *"Once employees feel challenged, invigorated and productive, their efforts will naturally translate into profit and growth for the organisation."* Servant-Leaders nurture organizational practices to promote such work. This symposium will include case studies, keynote presentations and a plenary debate to shed light on the gentle art of serving and leading, and how leaders can acknowledge and develop meaningfulness at work. In dialogue with the audience, we aim to explore leadership dilemmas that arise in different organizational contexts, responding to the engagement of employees in search of sense making and meaningful work.

We look forward to meeting you at this special event.

On behalf of the organising team,

prof. dr. Fons Trompenaars & dr. Sylvia van de Bunt
Chairpersons of symposium and SERVUS co-directors

Programme

- 11.00 Welcome and Opening
- Contextualizing the symposium theme by **Sylvia van de Bunt***
- 11.15 Student team presentation; *to what extent can Semco style be applied in any organization?*
- 11.30 *Make work awesome by busting bureaucracy*, by **Luuk Willems**, co-founder of the Semco Style Institute, www.semcostyle.org
- 11.50 Q&A
- 12.00 *The meaning of work across cultures*, by **Fons Trompenaars**
- 12.30 Q&A
- 12.45 Panel with students, Luuk Willems and Fons Trompenaars; *how to find balance between freedom and control in your organization?*
- 13.10 Closure
- 13.15 Farewell