

# **Faith and Spirituality in the Workplace:**

## **A Business Case Study of the Geert Groote Institute, Windesheim University**

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## **I. Introduction**

Windesheim University of Applied Sciences is one of the largest universities of professional education in the Netherlands, as a result of the merger of ten individual, mostly Christian, colleges in 1986. It is located in the city of Zwolle, capital of Overijssel, one of the eastern provinces of the country.

Windesheim University is focused on education, research and entrepreneurship. These activities are organized within four domains; each composed of related educational programs and expertise centers in which research takes place. The domains are Technical Sciences, Human Movement & Education, Social Work & Health Care and Economics, Management, Media & Communication. In cooperation with the Free University of Amsterdam, Windesheim University offers programmes leading to bachelor and master degrees in all these fields. At present Windesheim University counts some 21,500 students and over 1,750 employees. Among the students there is an increasing number of international students. Every department offers at least one semester course in English.

Windesheim, as a comprehensive institution for higher education has a responsibility for the society it forms part of. The institution is a community in which active people, each with their own expertise, meet each other. Windesheim aims to be an innovative knowledge and expertise center that challenges individuals and groups to develop into responsible, valuable and value-driven, self-conscious professionals who:

- Have knowledge and competencies relevant to current society
- Wish to operate on a higher professional level
- Realize personal growth and
- Contribute to the development, improvement and renewal of companies, social institutions and public organizations.



Fig. 2. Entrance building and auditorium

All the University's departments are located on one campus site at the south end of the city. Student housing facilities are situated in several places in town and some at the Campus. Windesheim makes a real effort to help every student and employee to feel at home. The following case study focuses primarily on a the Geert Groote Institute, a center within Windesheim University, which is responsible for the continuous dialogue on the identity and values of the larger university and offers a wide range of programs for staff members and students.

## II. Research methodology

The purpose of this case study is to examine the spiritual development programs of the Geert Groote Institute, which is the organizational unit responsible for an ongoing dialogue on the identity of Windesheim University. The Geert Groote iInstitute fulfilled its mission by providing off-site retreats for employees, managers and students, by organizing other reflective activities and by advising the Board of Directors on identity and values.

This case study was performed with the objective to investigate how reflection on values is integrated in daily work within a large educational institution and how the organization can facilitate the ongoing dialogue on identity and values.

As a freelancer from outside Windesheim, I have been involved in designing and leading some of these programs from 2001 – 2006. Together with the founder of GGI, I developed and led a Train-the-Trainer program in order to enlarge the group of program leaders. I have also been involved in leading off site programs on the Windesheim identity and values for the Management Teams of several Schools in 2011.

To collect the information for this case study, I have studied

- Written materials on the identity of Windesheim
- Evaluation forms completed by participants
- The Application forms for the Willis Harman Award
- An article on the two-day retreat programs by GGI staff member Jan van Dijk.
- A study on the impact of retreat programs at Windesheim, done by Marjo Lips
- Observations of retreat programs and conversations with GGI staff members
- The book *Bewogen Mensen*, which was composed to celebrate the fifteen's anniversary of the Geert Groote Institute

Prior to publication, a member of the Board of Directors, Jan Willem Meinsma, the coordinator of GGI Elja Kalisvaart, and a staff member of the GGI, Jan van Dijk, were given the opportunity to read and where needed revise the case study text.

First, I will briefly introduce the wider organization, Windesheim University. I will then focus on the position of the GGI within Windesheim University and the history of the GGI. Then, I will give a brief overview of the organizational culture, describing the spiritual history of the institute, the key values of the organization and specific challenges the organization has encountered in maintaining an open dialogue on identity and values. I will describe more in depth the design of the retreat programs and discuss the impact of the programs on both the individual and the organization.

Following, I will discuss the role of reflection on the deeper meaning of one's working life in an organizational context. To conclude, I will draw some lessons to be learnt from the experiences of the Geert Groote Institute.

### **III. A. History of the Geert Groote Institute**

In 1994, the Board of Directors asked a theologian and social scientist, Aad Kik, to reformulate its mission statement and values. The outcome was to be leading for a new five-year strategy plan. While working on this assignment, Aad Kik realized that such a formulation would hardly make any difference in the life and work of students and employees. At best it would land on a shelf, surrounded by many other in itself interesting documents. He therefore proposed to the Board to set up a center in the heart of the university, which would be responsible for an ongoing dialogue on Windesheim's mission and values. Such a center would not claim to have any answers but instead to pose the right questions. The Board accepted and Aad Kik was assigned to develop this new center. In February 1996 the center was officially inaugurated and its mission became "to provide opportunities for learning and working with depth."

The name Geert Groote Institute refers to Geert Groote, the spiritual and practical leader of the Devotio Moderna Movement, which grew rapidly in the area around Zwolle in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Through meditative identification with the sufferings of Jesus, the Movement's members hope to come to the Father. This practice was called *Imitatione Dei*, just as the masterpiece written by Thomas à Kempis, who later became the world famous theological master of this movement.



Fig. 4. Geert Groote surrounded by his pupils. Aquarelle by A.J. Derkinderen (1885)

Though modest in size (3 part time employees and an assistant), the Geert Groote Institute (GGI) soon acquired a reputation among employees and students, and even to people in the vicinity of Windesheim, such as inhabitants of the city of Zwolle. Activities included lectures on religious (often ethical) issues and on cultural topics with spiritual aspects, films and debate programs, publications on values and inspiration, etc. The staff members of GGI also advised the Board of Directors on value aspects of strategy and policy.

### **III. B. Retreats**

In 1999 the GGI presented a plan to the Board of Directors to offer all employees the opportunity for reflection on their motivation, their inspiration and spirituality in the form of a two days' retreat program under the title 'Time for Reflection and Inspiration' to be held off-campus in a monastery or a similar religious center. The University Board of Directors warmly endorsed the idea and gave permission for employees to participate in these retreats during working hours and provided funds to facilitate free-of-charge participation. Still, it took quite some effort to recruit

the first and second group of participants from among the employees. People were not used to spending time on courses other than competence-based or skill-enhancing programs. Managers found it difficult to allow their team-members to take leave for ‘reflection on their inspiration’. Likewise, employees hesitated to ask their boss to allow them to take off for two days of ‘spiritual re-sourcing’. Nevertheless, a group of fifteen men and women, of different age, from various departments and positions applied and were delighted with the experience. The same was true for the second group of fifteen employees who returned with great satisfaction. After these two trials, the Board agreed to have two retreats a year, open to every university employee. Since its start in 1999, ‘Time for Reflection and Inspiration’ has been organized 22 times and included a total number of 212 participants from all levels and corners of the university. In the first few years of its existence, the retreats were the main form in which the GGI contributed to a value-driven and meaningful work climate.

### **III. C. Follow up programs**

In the evaluation forms participants suggested to offer follow up programs along this line. This led to the development of another program, ‘Search for Meaning and Spirituality’, in nature similar to the first, but with more depth and challenge. Again, the Board welcomed the proposal and made funds available. Early participants of the first retreat program were asked if they were interested to participate in this follow up program. 80% of them reacted positively, 40% of them participated in the first round and the other 40% in the second round. There have been 9 groups, with in total one hundred participants, who have taken this follow up program over the years. Another suggestion made by participants, to develop a similar program focused on managers, in which they would be offered the opportunity to reflect on spirituality and their leadership, was turned into a successful program (‘Inspirational leadership’). Its main purpose is to help managers to move away from traditional controlling types of leadership towards inspiring and caring leadership. After a try out with a group of management trainees, this retreat is now being offered to all the managers of the university and became an integral part of the University’s HRM development program.

Other colleges, universities and companies, having heard of the positive experiences at Windesheim, started approaching the Geert Groote Institute with requests to assist them in



developing similar programs in their organizations. Although the GGI has no marketing ambitions in this respect, it has shared ‘its blessings’ with several likeminded people and institutions. In order to meet the growing interest from within the university and to respond to requests from outside, the GGI developed a train-the-trainers program and started recruiting potential co-trainers and coaches for its growing scheme.

### **III. D. Success and Recognition**

In 2003, Windesheim University was honored the Spirti at Work/Willis Harman Award for the creation of the Geert Groote Institute and its inspiring retreat programs. As a result of the Award, the interest for the retreat courses expanded even more. Several organizations sought advice from the GGI on how to make room for reflection and inspiration in the workplace. The College for Professional Education of Utrecht is an example of such an organization. After some retreat programs with the help of GGI, it has developed its own Martin Buber Institute with a similar task within the college.

Just when GGI was celebrating its fifteen’s anniversary, the Board of Directors chose in 2011 not to continue a separate Institute. Its arguments were that assigning the responsibility for the ongoing dialogue on identity and values to one organizational unit did not encourage other staff members to contribute to a value-driven culture. They therefore chose to take a more integrated approach.

### **IV. Organizational Culture**

“A gardener must make an effort to work the earth and then sow. Then he needs to wait patiently for the seeds to grow and flower and finally to give fruits. Much in the same way we,

in most things we do, need patience. We must wait for early rains and late rains and finally there will be fruits that can be harvested.”

- *Geert Groote (1340 – 1394)*

#### **IV. A. Spiritual History**

The merger of Several Christian colleges into Windesheim University was the result of two convictions: ‘economies of scale in higher education leads to quality improvement’ and ‘education by definition is not value-free’. The first Board tried to find a suitable name for what was called the Christian University for Applied Sciences. The name had to connect the colleges, be founded in and recognizable for the region and matching the identity, without a focus on any particular church. The newly formed university chose the name “Windesheim“, which comes from a village in the vicinity of the city of Zwolle, where in the 14th century the religious and social pre-reformation movement, the Devotio Moderna, established its central monastery.



Fig. 5 The original Devotia Moderna monastery in the small village of Windesheim.

The Devotio Moderna can be described by ‘a renewed interiority’. Geert Groote, from the close-by village of Deventer, was one of the initiators of this return to interiority. He claimed that the church had become too much focused on external aspects and providing too little moral

guidance. The population, wealthy because of the flourishing trade in the region, was driven by possessions, worldly status and well-paid jobs.

Geert Groote had studied in Paris and, after a few years as a priest gave up his Church career and started preaching on his own account. He criticized the many abuses of the church and attracted many followers who were called the Devotia Moderna. Because Geert Groote wanted to give expression to this new devotion outside the church institutions, he started community houses for the common people who wanted to live a spiritual life, but without the outer symbols of the church, such as Order regulations, vows and habits.

The Board of Directors substantiated their choice for the name of Windesheim, with a quotation from the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur: “Only those contemporary schools of thought which re-interpret their sources, have a viable future”. This was to be both a fundamental attitude as a challenge for the future of the newly formed university. This attitude connects tradition and future. The *future* is important, as are the *sources* of European culture, and *reinterpretation*. Tradition succumbs if it is only preserved. It is important to recreate the old values in our current time. This concept of ‘contemporary’ was the essence of Devotia Moderna, for they wanted to reinterpret the Christian tradition in their time. The Board saw this as a major challenge for the newly formed university.

The first few years, the name was Christian University Windesheim. The Christian identity was so natural and self-evident to the founders of the university, that there were no specific activities to keep this identity alive. The pedagogical tasks and a broad concept of education were the central goals, reconnecting with sources and finding modern expressions were the way.

Spirituality was assumed to be integrated in everyday work.

In the eighties and nineties, with its increasing secularization, students started criticizing the fact that the university called itself a Christian university, yet in everyday life they didn’t notice major differences with any other university. This led to two efforts from the Board of Directors to put identity on the agenda in a more formal way. The reformulation of the mission, vision and values were one result, the formation of the Geert Groote Institute in 1996 was the other. The name of Geert Groote was an expression of the desire to create some room for interiority, reflection and inspiration in the heart of the large university organization.<sup>1</sup>

#### **IV. B. Key values**

As a result of the merger in 1986 of ten Christian and non-Christian colleges, the new Windesheim University obtained a Christian identity. The founders of that day chose for a non-denominational, widely ecumenical reference to Judeo-Christian values as their source of inspiration. Employees were from then on demanded to recognize those values and to actively contribute to a related climate. Students were asked to respect the identity and accept the diversity of beliefs within the university community. In the course of the past fifteen years, as a result of some influx of migrant students, Windesheim engaged in an active, interreligious dialogue, however, without losing the ties with its historic roots. An internal document on Identity calls this heterogeneity ‘a source of richness and creativity’. Christian identity within Windesheim means a respectful travelling together.

The University’s mission statement stated that, with reference to the Judeo-Christian principles, their core values were:

- Trustworthiness and participatory behavior
- Respect, appreciation and attention for each individual
- Accountability
- Social involvement and care for environment and sustainability
- Enjoying work as a gift and a challenge

In 2010, the Board and the school principals explored their personal inspiration in light of the Windesheim identity. Using storytelling, they reflected on their personal values. They also collected elements of what they saw as ‘The Windesheim culture and values’.

As a result of this meeting, the Board formulated a set of values, which characterize the Windesheim organization, such as quality, professionalism, diversity and a meaningful role in society. Similar meetings with the management teams of several Schools followed this meeting.

Three recurring values are:

- Continuous quality improvement
- Using diversity as strength
- Taking responsibility for society

#### IV. C. Spiritual Retreat Programs

The retreat programs have marked the early years of the GGI. These programs were a contemporary form of the retreats that were held in the time of Devotia Moderna. The purpose of the programs was to refresh the participant's contact with his/her inspirational and spiritual resources and to offer a place for staff members to share what touches and inspires them. These need not necessarily be officially Christian or solely religious of nature. There is room for each individual to follow his/her own path towards inspirational renewal.

Two trainers (male and female), both from inside and outside Windesheim, led a group of usually around 15 participants. The program includes a wide variety of methods and activities to reach that goal, including small group exchange, body-and-mind exercises, poem writing, video portraits of spiritual leaders, and artistic exercises. If the location where the retreat is held houses a religious order, the group takes part in their prayer sessions. If not, the group has its own intervals for prayer and meditation.

Two or three months after the retreats, group members are invited to a short retrospect and follow-up meeting. On such occasions almost all the participants report that the retreat has helped them to make a decision or take a step toward improving the quality of their personal life. The overall evaluation of the experience has, for the vast majority of the participants, been extremely positive. Almost every one of them noted that he/she would recommend colleagues to also take part in such a retreat. And indeed, many of them successfully made the suggestion to a colleague, which resulted in a constant flow of applications. Some of the feedback from participants:

"Sharing what really matters in life - as we did - leads to high quality contacts" (*Rob, teacher*)

"This retreat has enriched me greatly. I now have a lot to share with others"

(*Klaas, financial controller*)

"Making contact with colleagues on the level of the spirit was an exciting experience"

(*Caroline, teacher*)

"Such an opportunity for rest and meditation is a wholesome treat" (*Aalt, consultant*)  
"Working on my inner balance was an inspiring activity" (*Wilma, administrative assistant*)  
"It was amazing to feel safe and at home with one another so easily, once we had left the daily strife and competition behind us" (*Ronald, senior lecturer*)  
"In times of frequent burnouts this retreat serves as an oasis" (*Betty, student counselor*)  
"I didn't know I had colleagues with so much warmth and inner richness" (*Peter, supervisor*)  
"My inner feelings have been gently shaken up and uncovered to myself" (*Agnes, teacher*)

#### **IV. D. Impact of spiritual retreats**

There are few empirical studies on the role of individual reflection in organizations and even fewer on the role of retreats in organizations. An article by Marjo Lips<sup>2</sup> explores the experiences and reactions to the retreat and focuses on the contribution of retreats to the individual and the organization. She interviewed 30 individuals who had partaken in one or two retreats and eight directors of departments in which more than ten employees had taken part in a retreat. From the study, three categories of findings emerged. Firstly, research participants articulated the importance of being provided with structured reflection on lasting values. This opportunity for reflection contributes to healthy functioning of both the individual and the organization. It was found that the retreats enable employees to become (re) acquainted with their self and prioritize deeper values, make conscious choices based on such values and re-assess a balance between different roles and priorities. The benefit to the organization is an appreciation for, and understanding of fellow workers as well as enhanced loyalty to the organization. Furthermore, directors reported that employees became pro-active in taking steps to align their work and their values. The organizational advantages of individuals being able to work together needs no further discussion, however regaining an appreciation for each other is particularly important in organizations that are in danger of moving towards enhanced functionalism or managerialism.

Secondly, Lips found that engaging in reflection on lasting values and enacting these values does not come naturally in an organizational context. In fact, there often seems to be something in the organizational context that distracts participants from articulating these values, makes them

(temporarily) forget them or stop acting out of these lasting values. One participant reflected on the hectic character of his daily work and his need for standing back. Another participant reflected on being in positions where he was violating his own principles, while a third participant commented on getting caught up in the organization and her need to see things in perspective, while also needing to be reminded to stick to her choices. A fourth participant talks about how somehow she does not articulate to her superiors what type of work gives her true joy and fulfillment.

### **Inspiration**

And suddenly there was this unexpected present from my employer. No, not the traditional Christmas hamper. As I am writing this, they haven't been handed out yet. I wonder which kitchen attribute will enrich my home this time.

No this present was a two-day reflection program in a monastery in Vught. "If I like it there, I may become a member of that religious order", I jokingly told my colleagues just before my departure. I was very tempted: the peace and harmony I would find there sounded like a good break from the hectic life in school (and in the world). There was just a slight problem: it was a male monastery, so they weren't exactly waiting for me.

But maybe I had been waiting for them unconsciously. Reflecting on inspiration and leadership – because that was the program's theme – turned out to be a much needed overhaul. Under the inspiring guidance of Lenette Schuijt I could stop and reflect on questions like 'what drive me?' and 'How can I inspire other people?' but most of all: 'How do I keep my inspiration alive, both at work and in my private life?' It was very nourishing. Strolling through the park or during a music meditation in the chapel, together with others, I had some amazingly clear insights. It was very interesting to hear what drives and inspires other participants and how they try to maintain their inspiration. And what Windesheim does and does not contribute to inspiration at work. Thinking about what 'makes the spirit move' (one of the many meanings of 'inspiration'), about what gets me going. An appropriate overture to the month of December, it seems to me. A wonderful gift from Windesheim under the Christmas tree.

*Petra, manager*

in *Outlined*, Windesheim magazine

Thirdly, the findings show that participants reflect on certain elements of their particular organizational higher education context, such as ‘a climate where we become more commercial and tougher’ and ‘the context of economies of scale, constant changes, the competition battle, forced market-orientation and input/output management’. In this climate, it was found, it is simultaneously harder and yet more necessary to reflect on ‘the personal values that remain non-negotiable’ and ‘what the individual needs to not slide downhill’.

“I certainly feel different about the organization, much more appreciation. That this happens is rather special. In my experience, this organization, particularly in the past, treats us sometimes as puppets that one just puts in front of a classroom. The retreat rises above that, it creates space and signals that the organization does have heart for its people.”

*Adrian, teacher*

#### **IV. E. Other activities**

After the first few years, the focus of the GGI was expanded to other programs and initiatives. GGI contributed to the standard orientation program for new employees and GGI staff members often served as advisors for the different Schools and units on issues like implementing their values in daily work. Together with the student pastors, members of GGI were involved in existential issues and traumatic events, such as the death of a student or employee. Also, a Seniors Re-sourcing Program was introduced for older employees.

In 2004, the idea was explored to develop a retreat program for students. Most of the Schools have courses in Ethics and the like, but these courses usually have a strong emphasis on professional performance. Little time in educational programs was given to reflection on and exchange of students’ personal values, drives, beliefs and spirituality. Two lecturers worked out a program (‘Reflection Survival’) that has been offered to senior students from three Schools. Lecturers and student deans have noticed a difference in the attitude of students who have participated. Students report an increased awareness of their personal values in relation to their field of study. Students pay only a small amount of money. Because it is considered to be a



valuable part of their studies, the university mostly pays for it. The course is now a regular curriculum item and is available to students from all Schools. For post-graduates, a Value-Driven Leadership program was developed.

#### *Dialogue and inspiration*

The GGI has developed several forms to facilitate staff members' sharing at the level of inspiration, drives, concerns and convictions. There were theme-based lunch meetings, student debates around current issues, debates between students and inhabitants of Zwolle, a study group around Modern Devotion, dialogue table sessions on 'slow questions' which require investigation and curiosity, and coaching sessions on personal sensemaking in relation to the profession of teacher.

For a few years, there has been a monthly meeting for employees and students aimed at inspiring co-workers and fellow students. Theme of these meetings is 'Work with a passion for...'. Once a month at the end of the workday, both employees and students had the opportunity to share their passion and talent. A professor might draw attention to her latest book, a history teacher might inspire everyone showing how to dance the tango, a student may present the company he or she has started during their study. By offering this opportunity, the GGI aimed to keep a dialogue on ethics, inspiration and identity alive.

The GGI published a quarterly journal ('Heartbeat') with in-depth articles. GGI members wrote columns in professional magazines and University periodicals, such as an article on the retreats by Jan van Dijk in 'In de Marge'. GGI also published a series of books, written by Windesheim staff members, and some poetry collections. They have organized a poetry festival, a yearly film series in which four films around a current theme could be viewed and discussed and there have been exhibitions related to identity. To conclude, the GGI organized lectures series in cooperation with the Soeterbeeckprogram (University of Nijmegen) and with Free University (VU-Podium).<sup>3</sup>

#### **IV. F. Education**

The past few years, the GGI staff has worked hard to integrate the issue of identity in the heart of education. A steering committee was installed for this purpose. It aimed to re-establish a close

connection with the Schools and to make sure identity was integrated in the educational programs of each School. One of the questions was whether there ought to be a compulsory subject in each educational program.

One of the result of the work of this steering committee was a minor subject program, *Meaning and Purpose for Professionals*, developed in cooperation with the University's student pastor Bert Koetsier, Henk Bleker from the Theology Department and Jan van Dijk from GGI. In this program, participants study and practice the importance of the purpose-dimension of professional work situations. They learn to identify their personal drives and values and to connect these with their professional work. Students also get acquainted with the meaningful frames of references offered by various religious and spiritual traditions. It is a voluntary subject and not all students are yet familiar with the program or choosing. Nevertheless, it is one of the most successful minor programs (highest number of students choosing this subject). The program has run for five years now and attracted 20-50 students each year. The initiators of this minor program currently look for ways to extend this approach.

#### **IV. G. Spiritual Practices and Rituals**

There is a daily meditation ('Seven to One') taking place during the lunch break, at exactly 12.53 in the University's Meditation Center. Student pastor Bert Koetsier developed this meditation. He supervises the daily meditation even though many different people have come to lead the mediation. Apart from physically participating in the meditation, there are many teachers and students who read the meditation on the Intranet. Now and then there are meditative 'silent strolls'. GGI has often used art expressions to draw attention to vital issues and invite colleagues to share and communicate about them. The institute also used art expressions to initiate a dialogue on the meaning of Christian holidays and celebrations. As part of the center's interreligious activities the members also organized an Iftar meal, the meal that Muslims eat after sunset during Ramadan.

#### **IV. H. Signs and symbols**

In January 2006, the GGI moved to their new premises with a multifunctional area especially developed for meditation, celebration and sharing purposes.

In 2008, GGI staff member Jan van Dijk come up with the idea to create a dialogue table, which

was designed and manufactured in close cooperation with artist Albert Geertjes, designed a dialogue table.



Fig. 8 Albert Geertjes, artist

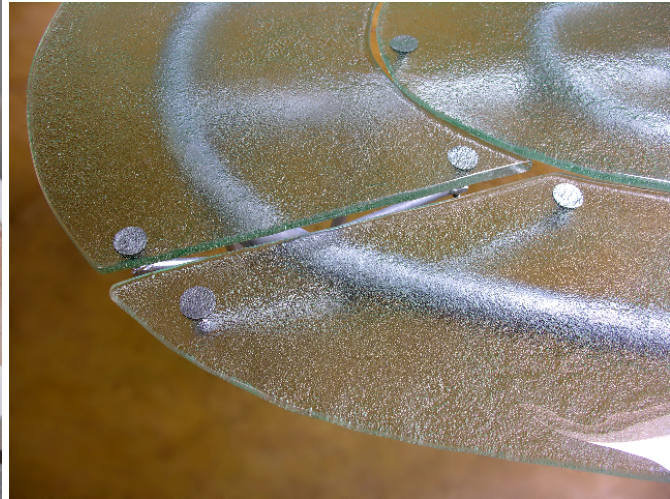


Fig. 9 Dialogue table

This table is placed in the central university hall and is available for everyone who wishes to start a dialogue. A conversation on faith and beliefs often gets stuck because of prejudice and judgement. In a dialogue the underlying assumptions are uncovered, allowing participants to investigate their own thinking. A dialogue requires an open attitude and the willingness to listen to each other. In the dialogue table, these qualities have taken a physical form. The table is made from float glass, cast in a sandbed to get its color and shape. A large stone forms the middle, like a stone in a pond, creating smaller and larger circles. The circular glass plates are supported by a steel construction. Around the table, there are fourteen wooden chairs in the shape of wet swimming pants. The idea behind this is that participants find themselves by the side of a swimming pool, sometimes dive into the conversation and at other times participate from the pool's edge.<sup>4</sup>

## **V. Challenges**

### **V. A. Identity and values in a multicultural environment**

By 2010 there was a wave of negative news from other Dutch institutions for higher education. The inspection published reports on the poor quality of many curriculums. Stories of fraudulent examinations and student grades, and of illegal enrichment by the Board of Directors of a major educational Institution severely affected the image of higher education. Windesheim did not escape the criticism. The inspection concluded that several students were unjustifiably given their diploma and that unless major changes were installed, the university would lose its accreditation.

This negative publicity fuelled a renewed interest from employees in the values that the organization claimed to have. They wanted a recognizable identity that they could commit to, a shared frame of reference, inspiring stories, a set of values and norms based on a collaborative sense of meaning. This placed the identity issue back on the table, although in a very different form than in 1996. The valid question, how to strengthen the University's identity and how the Christian tradition of the University resonates in that identity, was nonetheless a difficult one. The concept of 'Christian' values was not as natural for all teachers as it was in 1986, partly because of the process of secularization and as a result of the increasing diversity among students and staff members. How can a University formulate a collaborative frame of reference that Christians, Muslims, Jews, atheists, humanists and agnostics can all commit to? How can a University offer room for diversity and at the same time honor its Christian tradition? Especially older employees sometimes express embarrassment or even resistance towards normative aspects of Christian beliefs, such as judging each other.

### **B. The role of a separate institution within Windesheim**

Windesheim University had chosen to invest in nourishing such an open climate, from the conviction that students must be able to reflect on their actions from a source of inspiration and authentic values. They must develop a professional identity in which heart, head and hands reinforce each other. Because the university expects this from their students, it is only natural that employees and managers ask themselves and each other these probing questions. It is everyone's responsibility to keep such a culture alive.

In 2010 the Board questioned whether a separate Institute was the most effective way to achieve this purpose. A steering committee Identity was installed, led by one of the School's director. Two GGI members were appointed secretary and advisor of the steering committee. The steering committee's main goal was to advise on how integration of Identity into the Schools could be achieved. This committee concluded that it was up to School Directors to integrate identity in the policies and educational programs of each of the Schools. They suggested to organize two-day programs for the Management Teams of each School, in which they would reflect on how identity was to be included in the Vision and Mission and Year Plans for the School. This initiative was taken and three of the Schools have in fact held such a two-day meeting. A discussion is currently taking place on the concept of 'normative professionalism' or 'value-driven professionalism' and what it means for the educational programs of each School.

Following the Steering Committee's advice, the Board chose not to continue a separate institute for stimulating identity development. It has committed to an integrative approach, in which identity is an integral part of daily thinking and acting in the Schools. Based on her experience as GGI coordinator, Elja Kalisvaart pointed out that this approach requires an integration of the theme in the planning & control cycle, with its strategy discussions, year plans and accountability. It also requires every staff member to nourish 'interiority' and to connect this inner source to daily tasks and challenges.<sup>5</sup> She advised the Board to make someone responsible not so much for the University's identity, but for keeping the dialogue on purpose and identity alive and to encourage others to take their responsibility.

The Board decided to create a new organizational unit, called Windesheim in Dialogue, to make visible what the University is and what it stands for. Together with the Schools this unit will organize value-able programs, which are an expression of the University's values and identity.

### **C. The role of reflection in large educational institutions**

All religious traditions stress the vital importance of regularly reflecting on the purpose of one's life, on the values that lead our actions and on our spiritual sources. The absence of such reflection could lead to alienation from our core and from our colleagues at work.

One could argue, as did the Board of Directors in 1986, that education is not only value-based but also value-driven. It is therefore important for an educational institution to reflect on what teachers, students and society consider 'right' and 'justified'.

The quality of a teacher's job is not only measured by the number of students having received their diploma, but also by the lasting contribution he or she makes to the student's (professional) lives. It is therefore essential to reflect on personal and professional values, especially for professionals, who often choose their professions because they want to make a difference.

Professional quality is often delivered when profession meets vocation.<sup>6</sup> A profession is a well-defined set of activities that require competences that can be met by various people. We usually choose a profession based on external factors such as preliminary training, expectations of others or career prospects. A vocation however, is more closely connected with our personality and thus not as clear-cut. We do not choose our vocation; rather, it chooses us. It is a movement from inside, a direction we naturally feel inclined to or to which we are irresistibly drawn. Finding one's vocation involves turning inward, discovering what talents and passions are already there. Profession without vocation (or professionalism from the outside) is like an empty case. A teacher may be technically competent, but no real quality develops in the contact between students and a teacher who just transfers knowledge. True educational quality is generated when professionalism is developed from inside. This starts with an awareness of one's personal and unique vocation. When employees can discover or reconnect to their vocation, this contributes to alignment of work and self and also enhances commitment.

The evaluation study of the retreats by Lips (2006) showed that they contribute to the individual (re) discovering meaning and discovering some answers to deeper questions such as their vocation in life.

From an organizational point of view, when employees are not aware of their sense of vocation, they lack an inner coordinating and integrating source, guiding their actions as well as their interactions with others. Without this, an organization needs to invent how to motivate their staff. The lack of meaning of work becomes substituted or converted into the question ‘How does one get people to act and produce under conditions in which they normally would not be *motivated* to work?’<sup>7</sup> Such strategies can never replace dedicated commitment in an organization that simply provides the conditions for individuals to do what they love doing towards a purpose they believe in. If organizations take talents and vocation seriously, they trigger unexpected talents that would go unnoticed and pine away otherwise.

As important as reflection on lasting values may be, most of us struggle to do so regularly. Reflection, like many other life skills, is a discipline that to most of us does not come naturally, especially in the context of work.<sup>8</sup> Therefore to be offered structured reflection, even though this reflection is irregular and limited, enables the participant to not only focus and (re-)commit to lasting values.

“Accessing our capacity for stillness and being present to what is emerging may well be the most powerful tool we have- individually and collectively- to create the world anew.”

*Peter Senge*

### *Reflection in organizational context*

The importance of reflection is increasingly recognized by management theorists. Yet, as the evaluation study showed<sup>9</sup>, many people find it difficult to take time for reflection in a work context. They spend most of their workday with surface issues such as organizing, structuring and producing. Most organizations have refined techniques and advanced methods to address surface issues such as effectiveness, efficiency and quality control. Below the surface lie the

more intangible elements that drive our daily actions: courage, creativity, enthusiasm, tolerance and patience as well as cynicism, fear, burnout and hostility. Very few organizations have developed techniques to address these implicit and intangible matters, such as the meaningfulness of a decision or the individual and collective resources employees can tap into when they feel disillusioned.<sup>10</sup>

These themes are particularly relevant to higher education institutions, which are growing larger and larger and focusing increasingly on surface issues of structures, procedures, function and task description at the expense of aligning the organization with a sense of purpose. Many retreat participants reported that they experience this development as stressful: increased workload, time pressure, increased administrative tasks. The actual results of the espoused educational values such as ‘competence development’ are mainly evaluations, audits and assessments’, ensuring everyone is busy in assisting the mechanics of the organization, without taking the time to stop and ask whether these business values are in conflict with the organization’s mission or whether the organization is in fact making a difference to those the institution claims to be serving.

Research has shown that organizations that stand the test of time and outperform others, are able to articulate and hold on to a core ideology consisting of lasting values and purposes that surpass the functional business goals.<sup>11</sup>

Higher education institutions may be in danger of losing essential characteristics and valuable intrinsic dimensions if they become too adaptive to the market. The values of the market-driven growth of educational institutions, with its values of efficiency, control and growth, may oppose the inherent values of wanting to do ever better, using diversity as strength and taking responsibility for the surrounding world.

In this context, reflecting on values in an organizational context is difficult. At the same time it is vital because employees are more likely to compromise their own values when under stress. Structured reflection enables employees to understand or acknowledge that they are often asked to reconcile incompatible values. It helps them to decide more consciously how to maintain integrity in their work.



## **VI. Lessons to be learned**

For a number of years, Windesheim has expressed its spirituality in the form of a special Institute, offering a wide range of programs for student and teachers. These various programs provided for an inherent need among the Windesheim employees, a need for reflection on the meaning of their work, on their inner sources of inspiration and a need for a meaningful exchange with their colleagues. The success of these programs was enhanced by the fact that the organization provided the financial means and time for employees to participate.

The past fifteen years the spiritual landscape of this large educational institution has changed considerably. First, there was the merger of Christian and non Christian colleges, which led to a non-denominational, widely ecumenical form of spirituality, with a general reference to Judeo-Christian values as their source of inspiration.

Second, to the founders of the merged organization, the Christian roots were self-evidently integrated in every activity, but secularization has taken away this taken-for-granted attitude. Spirituality and Christian identity became something that requires specific attention and needed to be managed. Also, the younger population felt less attracted to traditional forms like prayer and preferred other forms like meditation, reflection and dialogue.

Third, the increased diversity (one of Windesheim's core values) of the student and teacher population makes it difficult and less desirable to delineate the organization's identity too narrowly.

From being naturally guided by general Christian principles, to facilitating events in which people could nourish their personal spirituality and reconnect with the organization's identity, the role of the Board will shift more and more towards providing an open space for different forms of spiritual expression and an ongoing open dialogue to enhance mutual understanding and respect

There has been a tension between a natural integration of spirituality in every day work and a specific responsibility for making sure that spirituality is nourished and finds its expression in daily work. The existence of the GGI has helped considerably to keep Windesheim's spiritual identity alive, yet from its very start GGI was criticized for being an excuse for others to not take responsibility for integrating spirituality in work and education. With the dissolution of the GGI, the challenge is to make sure this integration is indeed happening. This requires leading by

example, active support and encouragement from the top and integration of spirituality into strategic visioning and planning, as well as in daily execution.

There has also been an inherent tension between the organization's identity and a personal sense of inspiration and purpose. Ideally, there would be an overlap between individual values and the organization's values, between personal reflection and nourishment and reflection on an organizational level. By uncovering their own inspiration and drives in one of the GGIO programs, people often realized how much they really fitted in the larger community and were able to reconnect with the organization's values. Storytelling and imaging have proven to be valuable tools to connect the two.

## **VII. Conclusion**

The spiritual identity of an organization is very much an organic and dynamic phenomenon. It lives in the hearts of all the students, teachers, managers and support staff. It comes alive in conversation about heart-felt concerns. When nourished, it is tangibly present in an organization, yet when neglected it can get overrun by procedures, structures and managerial issues. An attempt to define the core values can already be stifling. Spiritual activities, however successful, may weaken the responsibility of the organization's leadership to live the values and demonstrate, time and again, how the organization's purpose is connected to daily tasks. Keeping spirituality alive in an organizational context means protecting its intangible nature. The challenge is to develop techniques throughout the organization to connect the immaterial with the material in a way that doesn't smother the spirit.

## **VIII. Resources**

- a. Website: [www.windesheim.nl](http://www.windesheim.nl); [www.windesheiminternational.nl](http://www.windesheiminternational.nl)

- b. Books: *Bewogen Mensen. Werken aan zin en betekenis in beroepsopleidingen*. Zwolle: GGI, 2011
  
- c. Articles:
  - J. van Dijk *Op Verhaal Komen Inspiratie en motivatie in een tweedaagse bezinningscursus*. In: *In de Marge*, 15 (2006), nr.2 P. 17-23.
  
  - M. Lips-Wiersma (2006) *The role of spiritual retreats in higher education: the necessity for, and difficulties with, reflection on lasting values in a new public management context*. In: *Public Administration and Development* **26**, p. 123-133
  
- d. Brochures:
  - Op Verhaal Komen, program flyer
  - Spirituality at Work, Windesheim University of Applied Sciences, Gert Groote Institute
  - Folder on the use of the Dialogue Table :  
[http://www.thomasakempiszwolle.nl/?Literatuur:Na\\_zijn\\_dood:De\\_dialogtafel\\_op\\_Hogeschool\\_Windesheim](http://www.thomasakempiszwolle.nl/?Literatuur:Na_zijn_dood:De_dialogtafel_op_Hogeschool_Windesheim)
  
- e. Video: (The Windesheim building)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbbTWXimdeg>

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<sup>1</sup> Broers, H. (2011) De oorsprong van het vormingsideaal In: *Bewogen Mensen. Werken aan zin en betekenis in beroepsopleidingen* Zwolle: Geert Groote Instituut

<sup>2</sup> Lips-Wiersma, M. (2006) The role of spiritual retreats in higher education: the necessity for, and difficulties with, reflection on lasting values in a new public management context. *Public Administration and Development* **26**, p. 123-133

<sup>3</sup> Geert Groote Instituut (2011) *Bewogen mensen. Werken aan zin en betekenis in beroepsopleidingen* Zwolle

<sup>4</sup> Geertjes, A. (2011) De dialoogtafel In: *Bewogen mensen. Werken aan zin en betekenis in beroepsopleidingen* Zwolle: Geert Groote Instituut

<sup>5</sup> Kalisvaart, E. (2011) Dilemma's bij een zoektocht naar identiteit. In: *Bewogen mensen. Werken aan zin en betekenis in beroepsopleidingen* Zwolle: Geert Groote Instituut

<sup>6</sup> Schuijt, L. (2004) When vocation meets profession In: Hoefman, H.J. & Schuijt, L. (eds.) *Het Menselijk Gezicht van Werk* Rotterdam: Asoka

<sup>7</sup> Sievers, B. (1993) *Work, Death and Life itself: Essays on Management and Organization*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, p. 26–27

<sup>8</sup> Delbecq, A.L. (2004) The Christian manager's spiritual journey. *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion* **1** (2): 242-255

<sup>9</sup> see note 2

<sup>10</sup> Lamont, G. (2004) Reflectieve ruimte als broedplaats voor trage vragen. In: H.J. Hoefman & Schuijt, L. (eds.) *Het Menselijke Gezicht van Werk* Rotterdam: Asoka

<sup>11</sup> Collins, J. & Porras, J. (1994) *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*. UK: Harper-Collins