

## Summary

Is leadership development within a specific context possible, and if so, what are the preconditions necessary to achieve the intended effect? This study tests a concrete method for leadership development which has come from a theoretical framework and has been applied in practice in three different concrete case studies, and then further developed after reflection. The context-specific design per case study, working from a fixed frame of reference, is inherent to the method elaborated here, referred to henceforth as the Reference Method (*Referentiemethode*<sup>®</sup>).

The Reference Method is designed as a research method which is not limited by the formal organisation and which takes account of the interdependence of the individual, the organisation and society. These three perspectives are defined as essential for the development of contextual leadership, which is a synthesis of different leadership styles, sources and roles.

The study shows that leadership development based on the Reference Method is possible within a specific context if:

1. the insights of contextual leadership are used, making a connection between society, the specific organisation to or within which leadership is being given, and the leader as a person: *contextualisation*;
2. the organisation's strategic ambitions and values are taken into account: *ambition*;
3. the method creates a positive climate for development in the leader's environment: *learning*;
4. the method makes development measurable: *measuring*.

The power of the Reference Method is thus not in the model but in the dialogue that is initiated, resulting in sense-making, assigning significance and authentic choices by the leader. It includes a diagnostic approach in order to take snapshots of the organising process, in which various different reality definitions or social contexts are ascertained simultaneously.

The processes of adapting and sense-making ask a lot of professionals implementing the method. They are required to reflect, to look at things repeatedly and methodically and to intervene. In order to apply the Reference Method adequately, three roles are therefore distinguished, namely the programme manager (internal), the consultant (external) and the counsellor (external).