

UNRAVELLING LEADERSHIP DYNAMICS IN AN ALTERNATIVE FOOD NETWORK

A Case Study about the Herenboeren Movement in the Netherlands



Pascal Pelders

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Preface

Welcome to the master's thesis "Unravelling Leadership Dynamics in an Alternative Food Network: A Case Study about the Herenboeren Movement in the Netherlands". This thesis is written as part of my graduation for the master's program Environment and Society Studies at Radboud University in Nijmegen. The research was conducted between February 2023 and March 2024.

Being active in the Herenboeren movement provided me with a robust understanding of internal organisation dynamics, goals, achievements, and challenges. Contrasting these experiences with the most prominent knowledge gaps and critiques in the field of sustainability transitions sparked my interest in examining leadership as a social phenomenon.

For my bachelor's thesis, I utilised a methodological framework for data collection and analysis, incorporating numerous pre-filled sections. In this master's thesis, my objective was to elevate the scientific rigor of my research and enhance my academic skills by employing established qualitative methods for data collection, specifically through interviews and observations.

My lack of experience in conducting such scientific research, combined with my limited writing ability due to dyslexia and having an attention deficit disorder, posed a significant challenge and required additional effort. In combination with the need to balancing my responsibilities within the movement with the demands of the research led to excessive stress and insufficient attention to my mental health. Consequently, I experienced a burnout, leading to a period of mandatory rest between May and August 2023. When I resumed my research in September 2023, I faced the challenge of completing the thesis on time, coupled with the apprehension of a potential relapse. The support from Adam and my 'praktijkondersteuner' (psychologist) played a crucial role in effectively navigating through this period.

Due to the different timeframe of my research, there was no communication or collaboration with fellow students. I obtained permission to use the Herenboeren movement as a case study and 'be an intern' of HB NL. However, the condition was that no time would be allocated for guidance and support within HB NL during the research period. Adam Calo left the initiative to me to reach out for assistance. Sometimes I found it difficult to communicate with him due to the language barrier, as my English sometimes hindered me from making myself clear. But his feedback was always helpful, especially his extensive feedback on my first draft was instrumental in increasing the quality of the research report.

To independently steer the process was challenging. Hence, I am even more proud of the end result 'für mich' than 'an sich'. I see it as a reflection of a period in which I developed on both personal and academic levels.

I want to thank Adam Calo for his tips and recommendations but especially for his understanding and advice during a period when I struggled mentally. This support was crucial for my self-confidence. Additionally, I want to thank the management of HB NL for providing opportunities for interviews and observations and the team of 'De Kleine Aarde' for providing me with an inspiring workplace. I also want to express my gratitude to all the respondents who contributed to this research. Finally, I want to thank my father, mother, and sister. Without their wisdom, experience, and motivating words, this end product could never have been realised.

I wish you enjoyable reading.

Pascal Pelders Boxtel, March 22, 2024

Colophon

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Author	Pascal Pelders
University	Radboud University, Nijmegen
Student number	s1082688
Supervisor	Dr. A.J. Calo
Second reader	Dr. M. Kaufmann
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Abstract

Sustainable food security, climate change, human well-being, and health are major societal challenges, situated at the centre of a global nexus of economic, social, and environmental problems. Systemic change is needed but the entanglement of established technologies with business models, organisational, institutional and political structures create strong path dependency and lock-ins which make current agro-food system reluctant to transform. Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) are seen as ‘breeding spaces’ protected from market selection, where learning processes allow actors to develop new radical social and technological ideas. Their alternativeness, based on their deviation from the conventional food system, results in the widespread acknowledgment of AFNs as potential role models for change. However, sustainability transition scholars have a tendency toward structural determinism—the idea that transitions develop according to their own internal logic, separated from society. Not being sensitive to actors and agency results in little understanding of why, how, where, and by whom change occurs. Conducting inquiry about leadership within an AFN helps bridge this gap, as leadership involves active engagement of actors in processes of direction and co-orientation, which are conducive to facilitating large-scale change.

To move from an individualistic model of leadership, Social Practice Theory as progressed by Shove et al. (2012) is used as theoretical foundation. A practice is a routinised action, behaviour, or activity carried out to achieve a distinctive outcome. According to SPT, the practice represent the mentally embodied aspects of activities in which agency and structure interact. Shifting the focus from the actor to the practice as the central unit of analysis enables a shift away from the notion that leadership is an attribute of the individual and helps to get a detailed understanding of the ‘relational realities’—the complex and dynamic interconnections, interactions, and relationships within the movement. To comprehend how, why, where, and by whom leadership is practiced, and the role leadership plays in generating agency and achieving objectives, a qualitative case study is conducted. This study involves desk research, in-depth interviews, participant and non-participatory observations.

The findings illustrate that the organisational model, internal organisation dynamics, beliefs and understandings of leadership, and the actor involvement leads to a transcendence of the classic leader-follower relationship. Leadership becomes a dynamic, and shared social phenomenon performed by a range of people across the organisation. This leadership approach results in innovation, creativity, collaborative problem-solving, contributes to personal growth, and fosters engagement. However, contrary to the propositions of contemporary leadership studies, this research reveals that such a leadership approach does not automatically guarantee success. When the internal organizational structures are too loose, a distributed and shared leadership approach results in the limited establishment of a collective direction, coordination challenges, work inefficiencies, and accountability issues. The findings also show that individuals engaged in leadership activities play an active role in shaping these structures.

Consequently, the premise that the social practice of leadership facilitates participants to achieve their objectives is not correct. Leadership itself represents a form of agency with a recursive relationship with the structures of the network.

Keywords: *Leadership; Sustainability transitions; Change, Social Practice Theory; Agency; Structure Alternative food networks;*

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List of Abbreviations

AFN	Alternative Food Network
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CFC	Consumer Food Cooperative
CSA	Community-Supported Agriculture
COO	Chief Operating Officer
DAC	Direction, Alignment, and Commitment
e.g.	exempli gratia (for example)
etc.	Et cetera (and other similar things)
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GRI	Grassroots Initiative
GMM	General Member Meeting
HB NL	Herenboeren Nederland
i.e.	it est (that is)
L-A-P	Leadership-As-Practice
Pg.	Page
SPT	Social Practice Theory
STARR	Situation, Tasks, Actions, Results, and Reflection

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

After the publication of ‘Limits to Growth’ in 1972 it became evident that growing global consumption patterns exert immense pressure on the environment (Turner, 2008). Sustainable food security, climate change, human well-being, and health are some of the major societal challenges, situated at the centre of a global nexus of economic, social, and environmental problems (Garnett, 2014).

There are high-level calls to transform the conventional agricultural systems into sustainable systems that produce food within ecological boundaries (Vermunt et al., 2022). Yet, the regime—the entanglement of established technologies with business models, organisational, institutional, and political structures—creates strong path dependency and lock-ins, which make the current agro-food system reluctant to transform (Geels, 2011; Gernert et al., 2018).

The lack of substantial changes in conventional agricultural systems has resulted in widespread dissatisfaction among consumers and a growing distrust in the current regime (El Bilali, 2019a). This fuelled the belief that meaningful change should originate from the bottom-up, resulting in civil society actors taking up the role of change agents (Mangnus et al., 2019). This shift has given rise to the development of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) (Michel-Villarreal et al., 2019a). AFNs are systems of food production, distribution, and consumption that operate outside and challenge the conventional agricultural system (Corsi et al., 2018). Likened to be ‘breeding spaces’ protected from market selection, where learning processes allow actors to develop new radical social- and technological ideas (Bui et al., 2016, p. 94). These networks are characterised by alternative practices that prioritise sustainability, ethical considerations, local economies, and more direct relationships between producers and consumers (Corsi et al., 2018; Forssell & Lankoski, 2015a; Renting et al., 2003; Tregear, 2011). A prime example is the Dutch ‘Herenboeren movement’. This is an AFN currently consisting of 18 Consumer-Food Cooperatives (CFCs). The CFC is called a ‘Herenboerderij’—a membership organisation established by local residents who are the collective owners of the farm. Additionally, there is an umbrella organisation called ‘Herenboeren Nederland’ (HB NL), whose role is to facilitate these local initiatives in the establishment and continuous development of a Herenboerderij.

Unfortunately, the systemic focus of transition scholars, researchers and academics who specialise in the study of sustainability transitions, came at the expense of the theme of actors and agency, particularly the role of civil society has been neglected. The failure to recognise or explore the active role that actors play in shaping and driving sustainability transitions results in a lack of understanding regarding how intentional actions and decisions contribute to or impede desired changes. This causes actors, such as researchers and policymakers, to miss valuable opportunities to foster engagement in processes beneficial to large-scale change.

1.2 Aims and Research Questions

In contrast to the conventional organisations, characterised by clear lines of authority, with decision-making concentrated at the top levels, modern civil society organisations frequently opt for flat hierarchies (Miller & Miller, 2007). This organisational approach is marked by a reduction in the number of hierarchical levels, fostering a more decentralised and collaborative decision-making process (Grabs et al., 2016). In such organisations, the traditional top-down management style gives way to a structure that encourages open communication, flexibility, and a greater distribution of responsibilities among members (Raelin, 2016). The shift towards flat hierarchies is driven by a desire to promote inclusivity, facilitate faster adaptation to changing circumstances, and empower individuals at various levels to actively contribute to the organisation’s mission and goals (Gernert et al., 2018).

The desire to empower individuals at various levels is also related to leadership. Leadership is often associated with the successful influence that results in the attainment of long-term goals of the organisation (Drath et al., 2008). Effective leadership results in the establishment of direction, shapes the organisational culture, helps making informed decisions, motivate people, and foster adaptability—all of which contribute to the achievement of the organisation's goals and objectives (Miller & Miller, 2007). In order to meet the needs of modern civil society organisations, such as AFNs, scholars opt for leadership approaches with a distributive, and collaborative nature, collectively shaped and agreed upon within the social context of the organisation—a phenomenon socially constructed as highlighted by Reicher et al. (2005) and Sutherland et al. (2014)

To examine leadership as a social phenomenon, while simultaneously paying attention to the organisational context, a constructionist reasoning is followed. The relationship between leadership and context is recursive: leadership is produced by, but also produces the context to which it refers (Endrissat & von Arx, 2013). To make this point on a theoretical plain, a leadership-as-practice perspective is adopted. This approach is especially suitable for the Herenboeren movement because it is a complex, socially dynamic network in which there is little situated and formally allocated leadership. By shifting the focus to leadership as a social practice this research aims to get a better understanding of the dialectic interplay between actors involved in the Herenboeren movement on the one hand, and the desired change of the movement on the other hand. Such a perspective helps uncover the complexities of leadership, the underlying dynamics contributing to direction-setting, and the appreciation for the diversity of voices shaping AFNs. At the same time, this approach enables to challenges preconceived notions of leadership (Crevani et al., 2010). Moreover, adopting a practice approach to leadership helps getting insight in the important nexus between individual motivation and collective action, as well as the innovative, collaborative modes of value creation (Grabs et al., 2016).

To achieve these research aims, the study has several underlying objectives. First, it seeks to enhance comprehension of the concept of AFNs by elaborating on their characteristics and criteria identified during a literature review. To develop an understanding of the Herenboeren movement a document analysis is conducted to identify the stated aims and objectives of the Herenboeren movement and provide a detailed understanding of the organisation, governance structure, as well as the involved actors. This, combined with the insights gathered from the literature review, culminates in a comprehensive case description of the Herenboeren movement as an Alternative Food Network (AFN). Second, this study describes leadership dynamics in Herenboeren movement through a lens of leadership as social practice. The leadership dynamics are examined through multiple interviews and observations across different settings within the Herenboeren movement. Third, this research connects the observed leadership dynamics to tangible outcomes and the contribution to agency. These objectives help to understand the recursive relationship between the organisational context and leadership and its effect on achieving the desired change, which is encapsulated in the goals of the movement. Taken together, this study provides insight about how leadership may thrive in complex relational settings. These research aims have been translated into one research question and three supportive sub-questions.

Main research question:

How does the social practice of leadership facilitate network participants to achieve their objectives?

Sub questions:

1. *How does the social practice of leadership take place in the alternative food network?*
2. *How do participants regard the role of leadership in relation to the governance and internal organisation of the network ?*
3. *What is the direct impact of the observed practice of leadership on agency?*

1.3 Scientific Relevance

Due to the complexity and multi-dimensionality of grand societal challenges incremental change is not sufficient; systemic changes in the wider system and patterns of production and consumption are necessary (El Bilali, 2019b). Such systemic changes are called sustainability transitions (Grin et al., 2018). Despite the importance of sustainability transitions, during the preparatory literature review it became clear the young field of sustainability transitions is criticised for the one-sided focus on energy and mobility systems (El Bilali, 2019b, 2019a; Forssell & Lankoski, 2015b; Michel-Villarreal et al., 2019b; Opitz et al., 2017; Vermunt et al., 2022). According to Hassink et al. (2018) agro-food sustainability transitions received more attention in the last decade but the field is still ill-defined. Most research focus on the themes of politics, managing transitions and sustainable consumption (Rauschmayer et al., 2015). Nearly all of these studies adopt a systemic perspective—mirroring the interactional and dynamic nature of innovations processes with the aim to explain processes of stability and change at the macro level (El Bilali, 2019).

As explained, this systemic focus came at the expense of the theme of actors and agency, particularly the role of civil society has been neglected. Farla et al. (2012), Hassink et al. (2018), Markard et al. (2012), Hargreaves et al. (2011) and Fischer & Newig (2016) all consider the undervaluation of actors and agency as problematic. The failure to recognise or explore the active role that actors, particularly those in civil society, play in shaping and driving sustainability transitions results in a lack of understanding regarding how intentional actions and decisions contribute to or impede desired changes—resulting in little understanding about why, how, where and by whom change occur (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). Rauschmayer et al. (2015) recognises that a normative change to more agency-based approaches is needed but emphasises that “change appears to be rather enshrined in complex soci(et)al practices than to be the result of relatively one-dimensional shifts in individual choices triggered by particular exogenous signals: in clear, it is not the (change of the) price tag on a commodity that helps us understand” (p. 2012). Establishing a more effective dialectical relationship between the individual and the social/collective seems thus to be a necessary condition for improving our systems understanding of change and sustainability transitions. This is of special relevance in the case of complex and dynamic AFNs, like the Herenboeren movement, because these networks constitute an important nexus between individual motivation and collective action and often deal with novel, collaborative modes of value creation (Grabs et al., 2016). To illustrate, decision-making at the Herenboerderij is not determined by individuals making choices based on personal preferences or convenience. Instead, decision-making relies on principles of collective ownership, consensus building, active member participation, with the ultimate goal of ensuring that the interests and preferences of all cooperative members are taken into account.

The undervaluation of agency is closely connected to the second issue; the field lacks consideration of the influences of geography (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2016; Bui et al., 2016; Coenen et al., 2012). It provides an insufficient explanation of the processes by which specific types of established knowledge and socio-economic practices are incorporated into different spacetime contexts beyond the national level. (Coenen et al., 2012), resulting in a limited understanding of why progress towards sustainability is spatially uneven and context-specific (Lawhon & Murphy, 2012). At present, the specific geographical factors influencing the success of AFNs remain unclear. To illustrate, in the Dutch context, it appears that places with a demography marked by a significant presence of young, highly educated individuals, coupled with little or no conservatism, enhance the successful development of an AFN. However, this assumption lacks concrete empirical support and is not backed by scientific research.

Given that the field of transition studies neglects the role of agency, it is unsurprising that no research has been conducted on the theme of leadership in the field of sustainability transitions (Sutherland et al., 2014). In contrast, within the field of organisational studies, substantial focus has been directed towards

the concept of leadership as a driving force in organisational change (Shvindina, 2017). This includes diverse case studies about leadership within grassroots initiatives, social movements, and community-based initiatives. Martiskainen (2017) focused on the role of community leaders in the development of grassroots innovations. Fischer (2013) examined the extent to which leaders of grassroots social service organisations used transactional and transformational leadership styles and whether these styles were related to leadership outcomes. Onyx & Leonard (2011) examined leadership in emergent community projects using complexity theory as theoretical lens. Although interesting, these studies focus on the mainstream assumption that leadership emanates from an individual (Martiskainen, 2017). These traditional notions of personal dominance conflicts with the post-bureaucratic organisation models of most civil society organisations. Through their flatter hierarchies with a team- and project-based structure guided by flexible peer decision-making processes, they often transcend the classic leader-follower relation—leadership becomes a consequence of collaborative meaning making rather than the result of a fixed set of leadership attributes (Raelin, 2016). Some research views leadership as socially constructed phenomena. Based on desktop research, Uhl-Bien (2006) developed a overarching framework for the study of leadership as a social influence process through which emergent coordination and behavioural change are constructed and produced. Additionally, Raelin has made a substantial contribution to the examination of leadership as a practice, particularly through his proposed methodology for investigating leadership as practice (J. A. Raelin, 2020) and his leaderful practice model (J. Raelin, 2011; J. A. Raelin, 2021). Despite the initial efforts, there remains a scarcity of case studies focusing on leadership as a socially constructed phenomenon, particularly in relation to transformative change or impacts and outcomes. This might be due to the fact that identifying leadership in the absence of individual leaders remains a complicated proposition (Sutherland et al., 2014).

1.4 Societal Relevance

The Herenboeren movement aims to play a significant role in contributing to the acceleration of the Dutch agro-food sustainability transition. The long-term goal is outlined in the theory of change for ‘farming communities,’ involving the development of a fully sustainable, regenerative, enduring, and flexible food production system across 700,000 hectares of rural areas (Farming Communities – Our Theory of Change, n.d.). The Herenboeren movement aims to realise 1% of this broader objective, translating to the establishment of 350 Herenboerderijen (CFCs). To maximise its impact, HB NL concentrates on offering services to existing Herenboerderijen and promoting movement growth through replication of the concept. In practice, this involves HB NL investing substantial effort in facilitating new initiatives in the development and realisation of a Herenboerderij. Although operational Herenboerderijen primarily focus on the continuous development of their own farm, there is a shared objective between HB NL and the CFCs—the development of a nature-driven, socially connected, and economically sustainable food system.

The Herenboeren movement also gets increased recognition from media, politicians, and local authorities. Such a success story and the wide acknowledgement of AFNs as potential role models of change overshadows the flipside of the coin. There are general challenges related to (1) building and maintaining, and (2) diffusing Grassroots initiatives to ‘mainstream’ (Kump & Fikar, 2021). Seyfang & Smith (2007) discovered that, in reality, most initiatives spend 90% of their time surviving, and only 10% developing their activity. When looking at the Herenboeren movement, a similar trend can be observed. The movement is currently grappling with a variety of challenges. Herenboerderijen express dissatisfaction with the support and services provided by HB NL. While the goal of nature driven food production is meeting success, there is still significant room for improvement in fostering a socially connected and economically sustainable food system. The Herenboerderijen face difficulties in reaching the desired membership levels, maintaining the continuity of existing memberships, and efficiently organising labour. The limited financial resources further intensify the pressure on the movement. In

addition to the challenges faced by existing Herenboerderijen, new initiative groups are encountering difficulties in realising a Herenboerderij. This is primarily attributed to the current difficulty in acquiring land in the Netherlands. Moreover, HB NL has limited awareness of the needs of these initiative groups. Lastly, the loose organisational structure of both HB NL and the Herenboerderijen contributes to ambiguity regarding responsibilities, with individuals or groups frequently working autonomously without coordination. To make a meaningful contribution this research helps addressing these challenges and, in turn, advance towards the achievement of the stated objectives. It is imperative that HB NL effectively supports and guides the Herenboerderijen, tailoring their service provision to the specific needs of the cooperatives. Support and guidance is also crucial within the Herenboerderijen, where farmers, management, and committees play pivotal roles, but also the broader community not formally aligned with a specific group as they still play a significant role in decision-making.

Examining leadership as a social practice provides insights into the relational realities, the complex and dynamic interconnections, interactions, and relationships within the movement and the organisational context. This is primarily achieved by looking at the internal organisational dynamics, actor involvement, spatial-temporal aspects, the establishment of direction and co-orientation, decision-making processes, responsibilities, challenges, as well as elements such as appreciation and recognition. Additionally, it offers a comprehensive overview of the meaning of leadership, mobilised competencies, and the materials utilised during leadership interactions. Collectively, these aspects contribute to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which processes of change unfold within the movement and empower individuals to exert influence more effectively.

To further increase the societal relevance of this research. The new insights generated will be used to formulate recommendations for HB NL, aiming to provide guidance in addressing the challenges faced by the movement and fostering improved collaboration between HB NL and the Herenboerderijen. Moreover, the novel insights can be integrated into the support of new initiatives, expediting their launch with greater success. Thus, this research has the potential to augment the contribution of the Herenboeren movement to the Dutch agro-food sustainability transition by fostering the growth and impact of the movement. This research can also be significant for AFNs with similar organisational and governance characteristics—it can help new GRIs, social movements, and AFNs facing challenges in their early stages of development or are struggling to survive. Moreover, the research may prove relevant to farmers, agricultural entrepreneurs, politicians, policymakers, and consumers that are willing to change the current regime (Feola & Nunes, 2014). Getting an understanding of why, how, where and by whom change occur could assist them in the allocation of resources, not just financial ones. The impact of the research is further increased by the formulation of recommendations and the development of an advisory report.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The first part of the chapter provides an overview of relevant literature and current scientific knowledge about the features and traits, success factors, barriers, and the sustainability of AFNs, the concept of agency, its role in sustainability transitions, and the factors influencing agency and organisational objectives within the realm of social- and community movements. Subsequently, the most relevant contributions from the new leadership paradigm are discussed emphasising new leadership styles and models, along with a fresh foundational perspective that views leadership as a social phenomenon. This includes an exploration of the leadership-as-practice (L-A-P) approach and the leaderful model. The second part addresses the SPT as progressed by Shove et al. (2012), which functions as the foundation of the theoretical framework. In the final section, the central theoretical concepts, the leadership-related context, the social practice of leadership, consisting of leadership-as-performance and leadership-as-entirety, and agency are integrated into the conceptual framework and operationalised.

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Alternative Food Networks: Success and Agency Dynamics

AFNs serve as umbrella term within the academic literature, encompassing a wide array of initiatives establishing novel connections between food production and consumption to advance environmental and social justice principles (Corsi et al., 2018). According to Opitz et al. (2017), the three most frequent types of AFNs are Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA), food cooperatives, and self-harvest gardens. Additionally, specialised food retailers, organic farming, fair trade initiatives, and products with a geographical indication of origin are often referred to as AFNs (Michel-Villarreal et al., 2019). Despite the extensive body of scientific literature on the subject, a commonly agreed-upon definition of AFNs remains absent. The lack of consensus can be attributed, in part, to the focus on diverse phenomena, leading to the utilization of differing criteria for defining (Corsi et al., 2018). To get a better understanding of the concept Forssell & Lankoski (2015) bundled characteristics, identified during a literature review, into background-, core- and outcome characteristics. Background characteristics are about participants' non-conventional values and goals. Core characteristics are increased requirements for products and production, reduced distance between producers and consumers and new forms of market governance. Outcome characteristics are strong relationships often illustrated by trust and social embeddedness. Tregear (2011) emphasises the need to distinguish among types of AFNs instead of attributing common characteristics. In line with this rationale, Renting et al. (2003) devised a framework to differentiate between producer-consumer relations within AFNs, considering their organisational structure and spatial-temporal aspects. Based on this framework, AFNs are categorised into three groups: Face-to-face (direct interaction between producers and consumers), proximate (involving relations of proximity) and extended (When producers and consumers do not directly interact). Watts et al. (2005) classify AFNs as 'weaker' or 'stronger' based on their deviation from conventional food system. Weaker AFNs rely on product attributes like fair trade, organic certification, or geographical origin, while stronger AFNs encompass non-conventional systems such as farmers' markets, CSA, and box schemes. Jones et al. (2010) propose the concept of 'alternativeness' is context-dependent—emphasising the importance of analysing the distinctive organisation and spatial aspects of individual initiatives. By adopting a case-study approach, with a specific focus on the Herenboeren movement as the object of inquiry, this proposition is considered. Regarding sustainability, an ongoing debate surrounds the ability of AFNs to drive social and environmental change (Michel-Villarreal et al., 2019). According to Tregear (2011) assuming that unconventional food networks inherently yield economically, socially, and environmentally favourable outcomes is problematic. Born & Purcell (2006) express concern about the habit of blending the local scale of a food system with assumed positive consequences for the environment and local communities. Holloway et al. (2007) refer to "the risk of romanticizing the alternative" (p. 4), because AFNs are often not subjected to the same critical reflection

as conventional systems. Hence, this research thoroughly examines the factors impeding the success of the Herenboeren movement from a leadership-as-practice perspective. Specific attention is given to the most prominent challenges the movement is facing, including limited work efficiency, dissatisfaction about the support and services provided by HB NL, difficulties in realising social connectivity, organising labour at the community level, and stimulating member-involvement.

When examining the success of AFNs, it is crucial to comprehend the meaning of ‘success’. According to most transition scholars (Feola & Nunes, 2014; Gernert et al., 2018; Grabs et al., 2016; Hossain, 2018) success aligns with procedural sustainability, defined as “the initiatives ability to engage in processes beneficial to large-scale change” (Grabs et al., 2016, p. 8). Gernert et al. (2018) explored the current evidence on the role and success factors of grassroots initiatives in sustainability transitions, paying special attention to social innovations and the transformation of food systems. He identified preconditions for the success of grassroots initiatives across five levels (mini-, micro-, meso-, macro and meta-level). The findings highlight that AFNs, in particular, prioritise aspects such as democratisation, social inclusion, and participation, emphasising dimensions of social sustainability. Furthermore Gernert et al. (2018) found that by focusing on the root causes and system change, raising awareness of the current unsustainability and developing and demonstrating viable alternatives, the bottom-up initiatives, originating in civil society, open up new pathways for both sustainable production and consumption. He claims that the biggest contribution lies in creating spaces for learning and developing knowledge. He also suggests that being actively involved, in turn, can generate the positive experiences of self-efficacy and empowerment that are needed for both embarking on the transition journey and maintaining the intrinsic motivation of the members, thus ensuring the initiatives’ own success. Nevertheless, Gernert et al. (2018) remarks that upscaling often comes at the loss of the transformative potential of grassroots initiatives. Grabs et al. (2016) adopted a comprehensive approach, organizing their analysis across three levels of human behaviour: individual, group, and societal. Individual-level success factors highlight the importance of individuals understanding the problem’s root causes, feeling a strong personal responsibility, and possessing self-efficacy for GRI participation. Additionally, success is influenced by the presence of role models, adherence to social norms, and a positive self-image. Group-level success factors encompass legal status, crucial for both direct and indirect success, and productive relationships with government, funders, media, and organisations, with funding as a primary resource. Time involvement of volunteers and leaders, group size and skills, and leadership competencies, including conflict resolution, problem-solving, communication, organisational understanding, decision-making, goal setting and performance management, planning, and task coordination, are vital aspects. Additionally, factors such as membership size, diversity, trust, internal network density, communication quality, and the stimulation of collective self-efficacy play pivotal roles in influencing success at the group level. Success factors at the societal-level are a supportive institutional framework, with fewer barriers and recognizing ‘windows of opportunity’ such as regime destabilization. Recognizing the pivotal role of leadership in shaping human behaviour, these insights, especially those related to competencies and social dynamics, offer a significant and valuable contribution to understanding leadership within the Herenboeren movement, the effect it has on agency, achieving organisational objectives and long-term goals. Feola & Nunes (2014) identified five factors influencing the success of GRIs, namely initiative characteristics, members, resources, organisation, and context. Based on these groups of factors they investigated the replication of GRIs in different contexts and found that these initiatives define success along the lines of empowerment, social connectivity (internal), and environmental impact (external). Thus, to identify the success of GRIs one should look at the social links to members of local communities, capacity building and the empowerment of social actors as well as through their external impact and contributions to improved environmental performances. According to Hossain (2018), sustainability, scaling-up and success are three interrelated issues that should be discussed together. He labelled them collectively as “the triple tension of

Grassroots initiatives” (p. 66). He found that scaling-up is hindered by weak internal organisation, a lack of entrepreneurial skills, funding scarcity, key personnel departures, high turnover of volunteers, and policy changes. Sustainability faces challenges in being recognised for its contribution to sustainable development. The difficulty in measuring their impact makes it challenging for GRIs to attract attention from financial organisations, politicians, and policymakers. Moreover, since most GRIs operate as non-profit ventures, their success is not easily measurable in financial terms, impacting their visibility and support. These challenges relate to agency as well as more structural factors. By examining leadership as social practice this research will be able to look at all these barriers as a practice is produced by, but also produces the context to which it refers. Kump & Fikar (2021) adopted a systemic perspective to understand the challenges of maintaining and diffusing grassroots innovations. As these challenges have a strong correlation with the success of GRIs their insights make a valuable contribution. They found that food coops have an optimal size; when such systems become too large the lack of personalisation and personal interaction decrease the overall user experience. This is called the ‘paradox of diffusion’ as personalisation and sense of community are one of the core motives to participate. Hence successful diffusion of AFNs is better achieved by replication and translation instead of scaling-up.

In addition to success, which is an outcome, it is equally important to understand who has brought about the effects and outcomes and what factors influence the ability of actors to contribute to change. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the concept of agency and explore what the literature states about agency in relation to sustainability transitions. The precise meaning of agency varies depending on the context. Even within academic disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, sociology, ethics, and management, there is no consensus on the concept or about the way it should be operationalised (Frost, 2006). Notions of agency have been associated with terms such as ‘active striving’, ‘taking initiative’, or ‘having influence on one’s own life situation’ (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 46). Bos et al. (2013) refers to individual and collective actors as “participants in purposive actions in an attempt to prevent or generate change” (Fischer & Newig, 2016, p. 2). Agency, then, relates to actor ability to exert influence (Hitlin & Elder, 2006). The actor’s ability reflects the capabilities, the opportunities and constraints of the complex social web within they are embedded (Pesch, 2015). As mentioned earlier, literature and research about agency in the field of sustainability transitions is scarce. But in recent years a few authors tried to fill this gap. In an extensive literature review on actors in sustainability transitions, Farla et al. (2012) identified social movements, consumers, experts, research organisations, and individuals as the most important actors to instigate system change. Contrary to unintentional interplay, he found that change processes are strategically shaped by actors with a ‘larger plan’ or vision. He also underscores the dual role of individual- and organisational resources: while enabling agency, they simultaneously impose constraints on what actors could achieve. This aligns with the ‘paradox of embedded agency’—the challenge of how actors can change systemic and organisational structures that are enabling and constraining their very actions in the present (Walker et al., 2014). Moreover, in smaller change systems and networks, he observed the active involvement of a diverse array of actors. Throughout development and transformation processes, the relationships between these actors, their roles, and relative positions underwent dynamic changes. This emphasises the complexity and ever changing nature of sustainability transitions and the actors involved. Fischer & Newig (2016) conducted a comprehensive review of 386 journal articles on transition management and sustainability transitions. They explored the role of actors and agency, identifying different approaches based on systemic levels such as niche, regime, and landscape actors, societal realms, various governance levels, intermediaries, and supporting and opposing actors. The study highlighted the dynamic nature of actor roles in transitions, noting changes over time and the ability of actors to belong to multiple categories. They furthermore state that most actors experience limited agency due to dependencies. Two actor types were identified with weak or no agency: landscape-level actors and actors at the local governance level. These findings suggest a tendency toward structural determinism in sustainability transition literature, where structures only

constrain actor agency. Additionally, the contribution of Fischer & Newig (2016) shows that agency is always linked to actors organised around systemic levels, such as niche actors. This reveals a gap in the transition literature regarding the agency of individuals or groups within smaller contexts, such as GRIs or AFNs, contributing to processes of change. Examining the interactional dynamics of four distinct social movements, Dugan & Reger (2006) highlighted the pivotal role of agency in achieving desired goals. Their findings show that groups are less likely to develop a sense of agency when their members are only responding to crises or when their members are shut out of decision-making processes and their skills and talents are ignored. When agency was weak, participants expressed feelings of hopelessness or uncertainty about making societal change, or had a sense that they are not necessary for the group's goals of creating change. Newman & Dale (2005) Questions the importance of social capital as a primary indicator of a community's ability to engage in sustainable development as social capital can have both hindering and facilitating effects. They suggest that agency allows an individual or group to increase access to critical forms of capital to overcome barriers and solve problems. They found that 'bonding' social capital, consisting of strong network ties, is important but that excessive quantities leads to the enforcement of social norms hindering innovative change. In contrast, 'bridging' social capital, consisting of weak network ties, is always beneficial to bring about critical social changes. From this it can be concluded that a mix of bridging ties and bonding ties increases agency. Bridging ties allow the community to tap into diverse knowledge, resources, and support beyond their immediate locality, facilitating the adoption of innovative and sustainable practices. Bonding ties provide strong relationships and shared values, crucial for building trust and cooperation. Ling & Dale (2013) identified barriers preventing agency at the individual- and community scale. Barriers at the community scale are shortage of social capital, required connections between people do not exist and internal organisation is too loose, the absence of the required leadership to motivate, a lack of necessary skills (capacity) and absence of a common vision. Barriers at the individual scale are time constraints, a lack of interest; feelings of powerlessness or inadequacy, past failures of action, the inability to access resources (either through lack of connection or lack of confidence), freeloading, and financial, psychological and/or physical barriers.

2.1.2 Meeting Civil-Society Needs: A New Leadership Paradigm

The realm of leadership studies has been built around the idea that leadership is an attribute of the individual, focussing on traits, abilities and actions (Khan, 2016). However, since the turn of the century, there has been an alternative focus on leadership, shifting from an individualistic and hierarchical model of leadership to framing leadership as a shared or distributed phenomenon (Dinh et al., 2014)

Fletcher (2004) referred to post-heroic leadership: "post heroic leadership re-envision the 'who' and 'where' of leadership by focusing on the need to distribute the tasks and responsibilities of leadership up, down, and across the hierarchy. It re-envision the 'what' of leadership by articulating leadership as a social process that occurs in and through human interactions, and it articulates the 'how' of leadership by focusing on the more mutual, less hierarchical leadership practices and skills needed to engage collaborative, collective learning. It is generally recognised that this shift – from individual to collective, from control to learning, from 'self' to 'self-in-relation', and from power over to power with – is a paradigm shift in what it means to be a positional leader." (p. 647). In line with this reasoning James (2011) formulated three premises: (1) Leadership involves multiple individuals taking on leadership roles, both formally and informally, and collaborating in leadership efforts across organisational boundaries. (2) Leadership is distributed away from higher levels in the organisation, resulting in new practices and innovations as well as 'leaders at many levels'. (3) Leadership is understood in terms of practices and interventions, not just in terms of attributes and leader–follower relationships. This new way of thinking proposes collective, distributive, and collaborative forms of leadership over dyadic forms to meet the needs of modern organisations (Fitzsimons et al., 2011). As the Herenboeren movement is part of complex social dynamic networks within variable and continually changing

environment, leadership is expected to bear characteristics of these new forms of leadership. Discussing literature about transformational-, distributed-, shared- and relational leadership, the ones most often associated with civil society organisations, seems thus to be a prerequisite to get a better understanding about leadership in the Herenboeren movement and to relate leadership within the movement to these new styles and models.

Transformational leadership focusses on the dynamic relationship between a leader and their followers (Fischer, 2013; Grin et al., 2018; Khan, 2016; Northouse, 2019). It involves the transformational leader raising followers' awareness regarding the significance of organisational outcomes, guiding them to transcend self-interests, and elevating their needs to a higher level (Fischer, 2013). Consequently, followers come to believe in both personal and organisational success, potentially reshaping the organisation's culture. This leadership approach operates on the premise that individuals can acquire the skills necessary to become effective leaders. Paffen (2011) identifies four key characteristics of transformational leadership: (1) Inspiring Motivation: This involves the leader's ability to persuade followers and unite them around a shared vision and ambition. (2) Intellectual Stimulation: Leaders encourage followers to view problems from various perspectives and inspire them to find creative solutions. (3) Individual Involvement: Leaders create an environment conducive to knowledge acquisition and individual growth. (4) Ideal Influence: Transformational leaders are willing to immerse themselves in the situation, ready to make personal sacrifices, and earn the trust and respect of their followers. In a case study about grassroots organisations Fischer (2013) found that leaders who were able to generate belief in a shared cause, help members to see future visions of the organisation, and were enthusiastic and encouraging were most successful in mobilizing members. This underlines the importance of transformational leadership in community building and generating agency.

The distributed leadership approach addresses leadership together with teams, groups, and the organisational context. Leadership functions are distributed among (group)members via a division of labour across time (DeRue, 2011). The basic principle is the impossibility of discovering a single best leader characteristics and leader behaviour standards (Goksoy, 2016). The belief is that it is better to distribute leadership among too many individuals rather than to rely on one leader (DeRue, 2011). Liang & Sandmann (2015) found that many grassroot initiatives aligns, and coordinates tasks, processes, and resources along lines of expertise. Shared leadership embodies a participatory perspective where individuals and circumstances mutually influence each other (Spillane, 2005). Shared leadership is cultivated through cooperation and interaction, rooted in the competencies of all stakeholders, and driven by a sense of collective responsibility (Goksoy, 2016). According to Gronn (2002) shared leadership thrives most effectively within organisations comprising individuals who trust one another's expertise and experience, actively engage in participatory processes, embrace change and innovation, demonstrate productivity, and exhibit a willingness to exchange ideas. Consequently, the essence of the shared leadership approach lies in the active involvement of numerous individuals in leadership activities (Goksoy, 2016). Just like the distributed leadership approach the emphasis shifts away from individuals' formal positions or roles and focuses on their knowledge and competences. The difference with distributed leadership is that the acts of leading and following are occurring simultaneously across time and actors; individuals must both lead and follow for shared leadership to emerge (DeRue, 2011).

According to Drath et al. (2008), leadership transcends the notions of personal dominance (transformational leadership) or mere interpersonal influence (distributed- and shared leadership). Instead, it embodies a process of relational dialogue in which members of an organisation come together to construct knowledge systems collaboratively (Grin et al., 2018). This relational dialogue improves the system's ability to accomplish leadership tasks at different levels of complexity. Uhl-Bien (2006) characterises relational leadership as a social influence process that fosters the emergence of coordination and change. The literature on relational leadership highlights several key elements. Grin et

al. (2018) bundled these elements into four characteristics. Firstly, it arises from a collective of interacting individuals with open boundaries and a distribution of expertise among various participants. This foundation relies on an organisational culture that encourages transparent decision-making and communication (Locock et al., 2001). Secondly, relational leadership often results in collaboration working to improve population-level outcomes by changing the environment (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Thirdly, collaboration typically seeks some form of behavioural change or adoption of new practices (Ansari et al., 2001). Fourthly, to reap the benefits of relational leadership, practitioners must continually nurture collaborative and relational processes, frequently addressing issues of trust and legitimacy (Vangen & Huxham, 2003).

While these conceptualizations have their merits in reflecting new trends in practical workplace dynamics and reshaping established expectations of leadership, they primarily focus on novel practical arrangements (e.g., shared leadership) rather than formulating fresh foundational perspectives in leadership or redefining assumptions regarding leadership research. Simply asserting that leadership can be shared among two or more co-leaders or that it involves interactions between leaders and followers falls short of pushing leadership research beyond the tradition of being centred on individual managers. To challenge the strong tendency to concretise the abstract concept of 'leadership' through individual managerial roles Gronn (2002) suggests the examination of 'concertive actions', encompassing spontaneous collaborative patterns, intuitive understandings that naturally develop among colleagues, and institutional structures that support autonomic teams. Drath et al. (2008) advocates for an 'integrative ontology' of leadership. To replace the traditional trio of leadership research, comprising leaders, followers, and shared goals they developed the 'DAC ontology'. The DAC ontology highlights the presence of Direction, Alignment, and Commitment (DAC) as the hallmark of leadership occurrences. While this alternative approach is valuable, it also raises certain concerns. The emphasis on 'outcomes' within the DAC model poses challenges when viewed through the lens of process ontology. 'Outcomes' could be seen as the results of temporary leadership processes rather than continuous modes of social interaction. Similar to mainstream leadership research, it tends to focus on instances of successful, present, and convergent practices, potentially overlooking instances of unsuccessful, absent, or divergent leadership practices. According to Crevani et al. (2010), 'direction' is what is produced in leadership interactions. However, Drath et al. (2008) definition, which focuses on "widespread agreement in a collective on overall goals, aims, and mission" (p. 636) is a quite linear definition. Crevani et al. (2010) argue that direction encompasses more than just agreement on goals; it involves the ongoing, moment-to-moment construction of direction within organising processes. As a result, leadership interactions must encompass divergent processes and instances of conflicts, uncertainties, and debates. Therefore, Crevani et al. (2010) introduced the concepts of 'co-orientation' (enhanced understanding of potentially differing arguments, interpretations, and decisions of all parties involved) and 'action-spacing' (the creation of possibilities, potentials, opportunities, and limitations for individual and collective action). This framework allows for the examination of multiple individuals collaboratively constructing a confined space for action through their interactions. Thus to get a detailed understanding of the relational realities, one should identify and 'join' ongoing processes in organisations, searching for instances of leadership in terms of direction and co-orientation and action-spacing. Crevani et al. (2010) propose examining interactions in two ways: as they happen in real time and as they are remembered and recounted by individuals within organisations. They view these interactions as examples of specific situated practices. The use of the term practice directs attention to how leadership is enacted, shifting the focus away from the intentions of the actors. It emphasises the social aspect of work, its repetitive nature, and its continuity (Shove et al., 2012). Moreover, it enables examination of the micro-level without neglecting the macro-level; social constructs and structures (Reckwitz, 2002).

The leadership-as-practice (L-A-P) approach is a direct translation of this new foundational perspective. This approach emphasises collaborative efforts where participants, guided by their own rules, work together to achieve specific outcomes (Raelin, 2020). The L-A-P approach stems from a process-ontology and constructionist epistemology (Crevani et al., 2010). Leadership arises from social interaction as individuals engage in mutual inquiry, sharing their intersubjective meanings (Raelin, 2016). This highlights the practice of leadership as a process of social construction that emerge within social interaction. Researchers, within the field of L-A-P, observe real-world leadership practices and explore both ‘doing’ and ‘undoing’ leadership, using narrative forms and ethnography to capture ongoing dialogue (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Carroll et al., 2008; Cleaver, 2007; Crevani et al., 2010; Kellerman, 2013; Raelin, 2017). According to Raelin (2011), practice is not the same as leadership. Leadership is distinct, because of its focus on social interactions that produce pragmatic outcomes. To differentiate, Raelin and colleagues introduced the concept of ‘leaderful practice’ (Raelin, 2021). Leaderful practice, within the L-A-P framework, champions democratic values and collaborative learning and meaning-making, where leadership is a shared endeavour among all participants. The concept of leaderful practice offers four value propositions to L-A-P studies, which are referred to as the ‘four c’s’: collectiveness, concurrency, collaboration, and compassion (Raelin, 2011). (1) Collectiveness: The extent to which everyone can serve as a leader. (2) Concurrency: The extent to which members of the organisation are serving as leaders at the same time. (3) Collaboration: The extent to which members are actively co-creating the organisation and the nature of the dialogue in which members determine together what needs to be done and how. (4) Compassion: The extent to which members are dedicated to preserving the dignity of each member regardless of background, status, or perspective.

2.2.1 Doing Leadership: The Value of Social Practice Theory

Social Practice Theory (SPT), as progressed by Shove et al. (2012), is used as theoretical foundation. A practice is a routinised action, behaviour, or activity carried out by individuals or groups to achieve a distinctive outcome. Taking the practice as central unit of analysis enables a shift away from the notion that leadership is an attribute of the individual and helps to get a detailed understanding of the relational realities within a specific organisational context. This theory is exceptionally well-suited for examining leadership within the Herenboeren movement, given the limited presence of situated and formally allocated leadership. Furthermore, it allows us to connect micro-processes of social interaction to the broader societal discourse on leadership.

Theories of social practice emerged from the desire to transcend dualistic perspectives in understanding social phenomena. Dualisms in this context refer to conceptual dichotomy between structure and agency in social theory. Collectivist structuralist approaches, emphasise the importance of collective entities, structures, and systems in shaping individual behaviour and societal dynamics, and individualist action theories, attempt to explain all social phenomena in terms of intentional individual actions. According to practice theorists such dualistic thinking goes at the expense of comprehensively explaining the complexity of social life. The premise of social practice theories is that structures and agency are not distinct entities but are interrelated and mutually constitutive (Reckwitz, 2002). In other words, structures shape agency, but simultaneously, individual actions contribute to the reproduction or transformation of structures. According to SPT, the practice represent the mentally embodied aspects of activities in which agency and structure interact. Practice theorists propose taking the practice as the central unit of analysis to better grasp the complexity of the social world. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how individuals and societal structures continuously shape and influence each other in the ongoing dynamics of everyday life.

Applications of SPT differ between disciplines; there is no unified approach. Røpke (2009) prefers to speak of a “definable movement of thoughts” (p. 2490). It is a shared intellectual trajectory rather than

a rigid set of rules or guidelines. To give it more substance, Reckwitz (2002) and Schatzki (1996) formulated a more coherent approach to the analysis of practice. Reckwitz (2002) defined a practice as: “a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice – a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of others, etc. – forms so to speak a ‘block’ whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements, and which cannot be reduced to any one of these single elements” (p. 249). His emphasis on elements as the building blocks of practice has since been widely adopted. Shove et al. (2012) rationalised all suggested components into three main elements: ‘meanings’, ‘competences’ and ‘materials’. Meanings is about making sense of actions and activities; including symbolic meanings, ideas, emotions, beliefs, and understandings related to the activity. Meanings can be generic (shared by many practitioners) or specific (adopted by one individual). Competences is about the knowledge and skills needed to perform the practice, which are often learned through experience and training. Knowledge may be codified (principles, rules, instructions etc.) or remain tacit know-how (Shove et al., 2012). Competences can be generic (the ability to read) while others are more specialised (computer programming). Materials compromise the objects, equipment and bodies involved in the performance of the practice and can either be generic or specific. This component differs in that the body not only relates to the material component but also to other components as the bodily site for emotions (meaning) and embodied skills (competence) (Shove & Walker, 2010).

Practices are considered recognizable entities across time and space and thus pre-suppose some degree of regularity and repetition (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 1996). Hence practice theorists’ tent to focus on routines in everyday life. Although many actions are carried out as routines, Shove et al. (2012) argues that “practices emerge, persist, shift and disappear when connections between the three components are made, sustained and broken” (p. 14) (see figure 1). According to Røpke (2009) a practice is an emergent phenomenon; agents configure a series of physical and mental activities by integrating elements of meaning, material, and competence. Processes of integration are influenced by the wider social setting, the engagement of actors and spatial-temporal aspects (Røpke, 2009; Shove et al., 2012). So, the emergence of a practice depends on the coupling and uncoupling of human and non-human ‘partners’ under specific spatial-temporal constrains.

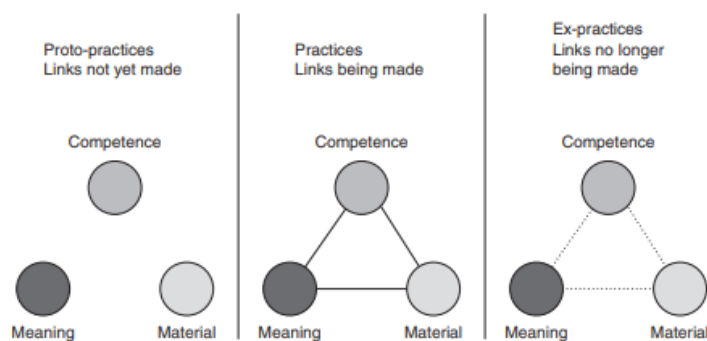


FIGURE 1 THE DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL PRACTICE (SHOVE ET AL., 2012)

The analytic distinction between practice-as-performance and practice-as-entity is helpful in showing how novel combinations of competence, material and meaning are enacted and reproduced (Shove et al., 2012). To give a practical illustration, the social practice of driving consists of a car, roads, and highways along with the bodily competencies required to drive and to use the affordances of the network of roads; the rules and norms that define the practice of driving; its meanings to practitioners and to outsiders. As such driving exists as a recognizable conjunction of elements, consequently figuring as an

entity which can be spoken about and more importantly drawn upon as a set of resources when driving. At the same time, practices exist as performances. It is through performance, that the ‘pattern’ provided by the practice-as-entity is filled out and reproduced. It is only through successive moments of performance that the links between elements, which constitute the practice-as-entity, are sustained over time (Shove et al., 2012). Thus, driving only exists due to repeated enactments, each reproducing the interdependencies upon which the practice is built.

It is important to understand why SPT presents a robust theoretical framework for this research. By acknowledging that the emergence of a practice depends on the coupling and uncoupling of human and non-human ‘partners’ under specific spatial-temporal constraints, the identified gaps in the literature—the lack of emphasis on actors and agency, and geographical orientation—can be addressed. The actor-oriented approach embedded in this theoretical framework facilitates a nuanced exploration of the interactions among the involved actors. Taking into account a spectrum of factors related to agency, including motivation, learning, skills, competences, creativity, collaboration, inclusivity, performance, well-being, recognition and reward, autonomy, roles, and responsibilities etc., helps in understanding how and by whom change occurs. The acknowledgment of structural elements as integral to a practice, internal organisational dynamics, wider social settings, and spatial- and temporal aspects, aids in dealing with the critique about a lack of geographical orientation in research about sustainability transitions. This contributes to understanding where and when change occurs. In conclusion, the adoption of SPT not only offers a methodologically sound approach but also significantly contributes to overcoming the limitations identified in the existing literature on sustainability transitions.

To facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the practical implications of utilising SPT, a concise overview is presented of studies following a practice approach within the realm of sustainability and AFNs. Shove & Walker (2010) tried to extend the scope of debate around sustainability transitions, which tends to concentrate on the introduction of new technologies and systems of supply, introducing aspects of practice theory as a means of conceptualising the dynamics of demand. To address the unique challenges involved in understanding transitions in practice and effectively governing them to foster more sustainable lifestyles, they illustrated how the practice of daily showering came into existence, how it changed, and disappeared. Additionally, they exemplified the effect of interventions on the dynamics of social practice by describing the effect of the congestion charging scheme in London on the practice of commuting by car. Naus et al. (2014) examined the processes through which established (carbon intensive) energy practices are being reconfigured or replaced by new, more sustainable domestic energy practices. Zwart & Mathijs (2020) used a social practices approach to study Voedselteams—a network of food buying groups in Belgium. They went beyond studying single practices, by analysing AFNs as consisting of bundles of practices. The results show that becoming involved in an AFN may also mean getting involved in other ‘alternative’ practices. Practices of buying food through a food team are bundled with the practice of alternative food production, distribution, consumption and preservation. These studies demonstrate that practice theory is already being utilised to examine transitions to more sustainable practices, also in the field of AFNs. Bowen & De Master (2011) examined the link between values and meanings attached to food to particular practices, involving shifts in social relations and strategies tied to power in the food system. He found that new social movements function as social laboratories in which people experiment, promote and protect specific practices. Hassanein (2003) adopted a practice approach to the concept of food democracy. The practice of food democracy facilitates and encourages making choices that creatively and constructively involve all the voices of a food system. He states that actively practicing democracy and reconfiguring the meaning of democracy in terms of food is ideally suited to the pursuit of agro-food sustainability. This because we cannot answer with certainty the question: how should we live sustainably? However, no studies have been conducted regarding the practice of leadership in this context. An important note is that all these studies focus only on the practice. This research also delves into the dynamics of the

practice of leadership, examining the outcomes in terms of contributions, both enabling and constraining, to achieve organisational goals and objectives.

2.2.2 Conceptual Framework and Operationalization

In this research leadership will be examined as social practice. The social practice of leadership is influenced by structural elements. The premise is that the social practice of leadership helps generating agency. The conceptual model visualises these core-components, concepts, and the relationships between them (see figure 2). Operationalization of the social practice of leadership is based on the SPT as progressed by Shove et al. (2012), differentiating between leadership-as-performance and leadership-as-entity, the scientific assumption of Crevani et al. (2010), that one should not only look at processes of direction but also at diverging processes, and the contributions of Røpke (2009), who suggests that processes of integration of the elements of leadership-as-entity are influenced by the wider social setting, the engagement of actors and spatial-temporal aspects, which are collectively called the leadership-related context.

It is crucial to highlight that the scientific assumptions proposed by Crevani et al. (2010), distinguishing between direction, co-orientation, and action-spacing, rest upon a different perspective of leadership. Action-spacing, the construction of potentials and opportunities, limitations and constrains for individual and collective action and the impact and outcomes, represents the leadership-related context and agency in term of this research; hence action-spacing is left out. Processes of direction and co-orientation are included because they help identifying the performance of leadership. These factors are thus instrumental in discerning and identifying instances of leadership.

2.2.2.1 Conceptual framework



FIGURE 2 GENERAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The expected cause-and-effect relationship between independent and dependent variables appears as follows: The social practice of leadership (1st dependent variable) consists of the practice-as-performance and practice-as-entity. The performance of the practice of leadership occurs when a social interaction leads to the construction of direction and, or co-orientation. How social interactions take place depend on the leadership-related context (1st independent variable). Through performance the leadership-as-entity emerge, persist, shift, and disappear when connections between the three components are made, sustained or broken. Thus, the relationship between practice-as-performance and practice-as-entity is recursive. The premise is that the social practice of leadership (1st dependent variable) helps generating agency (2nd dependent variable).

2.2.2.2 Operationalisation

Social interactions are always embedded in a complex social web. In this research referred to as the **leadership-related context**, which is operationalised using four broad collecting categories: (1) Internal organisation dynamics: the organisation's governance structure, division of labour, decision-making processes, allocation of resources and working atmosphere. (2) Wider social setting: The broader social context or environment in which social interaction occurs, encompassing societal norms and values, cultural influence, economic conditions and policies and regulations. (3) Engagement of actors: The involvement and interactions of individuals, groups, or organisations. Reflecting the actors, frequency and nature of interactions and the extent to which different actors collaborate or work together toward common goals. (4) Spatial-temporal aspects: The geographical and time-related dimensions that affect the phenomenon, including physical locations, timeframes, and temporal trends.

The interplay of these factors shapes social interaction at a particular moment in time. In line with Crevani et al. (2010), **leadership-as-performance** is referred to when a social interaction leads to the construction of direction, co-orientation, or action-spacing. **Direction** means the situated, moment-by-moment construction of direction in organising processes, dynamic agreement on goals, reflecting organisational values and responsiveness to change. **Co-orientation** is about the collective understanding of diverging arguments, interpretations and decisions, inclusivity, collaborative problem solving and learning and adaptation.

Through successive moments of performance the interdependencies between meanings, competences and materials, which constitute the practice-as-entity, are sustained over time (Shove & Walker, 2010). Thus **leadership-as-entity** is operationalised as the generic meanings, materials, and competences utilised in the performance of leadership. **Materials** refer to objects, technologies, and physical entities, such as farmers, members, and farm buildings. **Competences** encompass skills, know-how, and techniques, for example strategic thinking and emotional intelligence. **Meanings** include understandings, symbolism, ideas, and aspirations, exemplified by concepts like equality and collective engagement (Shove et al., 2012).

It is expected that the observed **social practice of leadership**, which consists of leadership-as-performance and leadership-as-entity, help generating agency. **Agency** is the capacity to exert influence. The concept of agency will be measured by the capabilities, the opportunities and constraints for individual and collective action of network participants with the explicit goal of bringing about or responding to change within the context of achieving the objectives of the Herenboeren movement.

In order to illustrate the operational dynamics of the conceptual model, a hypothetical scenario is presented, depicting leadership within the context of a CFC. Assume a democratic cooperative organisational model (internal organisational dynamics) operating in an economically prosperous country with robust regulations in the agricultural sector and societal norms and values reflecting a strong distinction between producers and consumers (wider social settings). This model involves farmers and local residents (actor involvement) and physical farms that are rapidly developing (spatial-temporal aspects). These elements give rise to an AFN that contrasts with the conventional farm. In this AFN, all involved residents collaborate to develop a farm to meet their basic food needs, resulting in the performance of leadership across a wide variety of actors. All residents can participate in leadership interactions involving processes of direction and co-orientation, leading to leadership as a distributed and collective phenomenon (leadership-as-entity). The democratic model encourages resident involvement in building and developing the farm, fostering both individual and collective action (agency). Simultaneously, the freedom allows individuals to become active in areas where their skills and competencies can contribute the most. People who are active in arenas aligned with their abilities not only enhance their leadership performance but also motivate others (agency), as progress is achieved through effective steering. This cultivation of agency results in the reshaping the food system by local

residents. The classic divide between producers and consumers is narrowing—residents take on the role of caretakers for their local environment, actively contributing to the revitalization of the rural landscape. Moreover, it fosters a heightened awareness of the crucial role soil plays in sustaining life and enhances understanding of more sustainable practices. This, in turn, illuminates how aspirations for sustainable food production can be realised within their unique local context.

3 Case Description

This section provides a comprehensive case description with a focus on aspects that shape social interaction I.e. the leadership-related context. The section starts with a brief description of the Herenboeren movement followed by an in-depth description of the ‘Herenboerderij’, and HB NL.

3.1 The Herenboeren Movement

The Herenboeren movement is a farmer-citizen movement consisting of 18 operative CFCs, 35 citizen-led initiatives, with the goals of starting a CFC, and an umbrella organisation called ‘Herenboeren Nederland’ (HB NL). This organisation focuses on providing services to existing cooperatives and supporting citizen-led initiatives in the development of a CFC. HB NL aims to play a significant role in accelerating the Dutch agro-food sustainability transition. To enhance its impact, HB NL focuses on providing services to existing farms and fostering movement growth through replication. In practice, this means that HB NL invests a considerable amount of energy in facilitating new initiatives in the realisation and development of a CFC. The objective of the CFC is less about the growth of the movement but more about the continuous development of its own farm. Indeed, the findings of Seyfang & Smith (2007) resonate with reality. The CFCs spend most of their time simply surviving. The Herenboerderijen face difficulties in reaching the desired membership levels, maintaining the continuity of existing memberships, and efficiently organising labour. These dilemmas often stem from a limited realisation of a socially connected community. In line with the findings of Kump & Fikar (2021), it could be that the current size of the CFCs, with 200 members and 500 mouths, is too large to develop strong social relationships and a feeling of responsibility. Moreover, the added value of HB NL is often not directly visible on the farms, a significant portion of communication and collaboration takes place through digital channels—the physical presence of HB NL on the farms is insufficient. Consequently, the services provided are sometimes inadequately aligned with the needs of the cooperatives. The result is that some members do not understand why the cooperative allocates a portion of its capital to HB NL. Hence, there are significant disparities in trust in HB NL among CFCs. Furthermore, individual cooperatives are increasingly operating as part of a larger movement, exemplified by collaboration between different CFCs.

3.2 The Herenboerderij (consumer food-cooperative)

Within the movement, the CFCs are called ‘Herenboerderijen,’ emerging from the desire to realize a regenerative, sustainable, and adaptable food production system. The cooperative consists of 200 households. By becoming a member, you attain a 1/200th ownership stake in the cooperative, ensuring that all members have an equal interest in the cooperative. As a result, management, and decision-making rest in the hands of all members. The member contributions serve as capital to cover operational expenses. Since no products are sold, no profits are generated. A portion of the contributions is allocated to HB NL for support and employership for the professional farmer, to whom the operational responsibility for the business is handed over. This farmer acts as the agricultural manager and serves the community.

All Herenboerderijen across the country are built on the three principles of ‘farming communities’.

- (1) Nature-driven: A Herenboerderij strives to create an ecosystem from which food originates. Ensuring minimal environmental impact by harnessing the power and complexity of natural processes, integrating, and closing loops, with a focus on regenerating the living environment for humans and animals. Efforts are consistently made to move closer to the objective of achieving zero inputs and becoming self-sufficient.
- (2) Socially and culturally connected: The guiding principle for a Herenboerderij is ‘what can happen locally should happen locally’. A Herenboerderij is integrated into the local community by fostering the development of a community with the aim of creating a liveable, green environment. A sense of ownership is important.
- (3) Economically sustainable: Shifting from an

economy of taking to an economy of stewardship. The supply chain is reversed, turning members not into not only consumers but also producers, or ‘prosumers’. This producer-consumer relationship extends beyond the face-to-face group and could, therefore, be incorporated as a fourth category into the framework proposed by (Renting et al., 2003). Additionally, a fair wage for employed farmers is guaranteed. The emphasis lies on sharing rather than owning, with a commitment to land preservation and the pursuit of the ‘right’ scale.

The governance and organisation of a Herenboerderij can be encapsulated in the following model (see figure 3). This model also reflects the most important social interactions that take place at the farm-level.

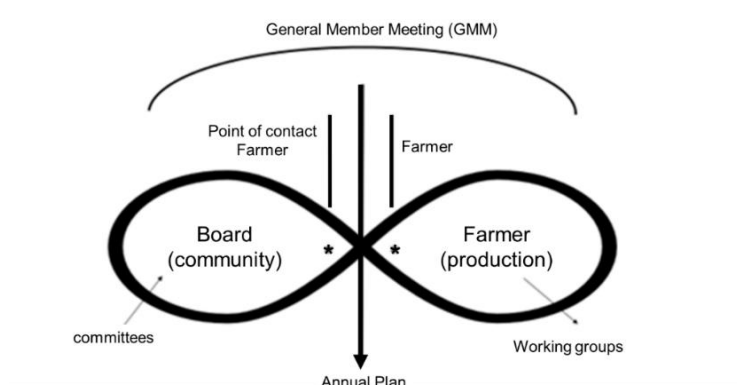


FIGURE 3 INTERNAL ORGANISATION STRUCTURE OF THE HERENBOERDERIJ

The General Member Meeting (GMM) is the highest decision-making body within the cooperative. The GMM is ultimately responsible for the functioning of the farm, and decisions are made based on ownership (voting by the community). This meeting is held two times a year. The board, consisting of members, requests and receives a mandate from the GMM for its directional plans. The farmer is an employee of HB NL and is seconded to the local cooperative. He or she is responsible for food production, the board facilitates the farmer as best as possible. The farmer has one point of contact within the board. They work closely together and share joint responsibility for the annual plan approved by the GMM. The farmer has the authority within the annual plan to make necessary decisions. On a Herenboerderij several community-based working groups and committees are active. Members are free to establish a working group or committee, leading to variations in the number and focal points of these groups across the 18 CFCs. The distinction between committees and working groups lies in their respective purposes; committees serve the board, while working groups serve the farmers. Each committee assigns a coordinator, and each coordinator is linked to a designated contact person from the board. The farmer has an open invitation to participate in any working group and committee meeting. The board serves the interests of the members, as well as the individual farmer(s). They bear the responsibility for daily management and decision-making, aiming to ensure a well-functioning and healthy organisation (people, information, resources, and finances). Additionally, the board serves as a key point of contact for the farmer, HB NL, and the surrounding community (including the neighbours, municipality, province, etc.). Their overarching goal is to strive for the implementation of the three guiding principles of farming communities.

The layout of a Herenboerderij adheres to a standardised design developed by HB NL. This design aims to ensure that members receive 60% of their daily nutritional needs throughout the year. While there may be variations in the specific layout due to differences in local geography and community preferences, a Herenboerderij typically encompasses vegetable cultivation, growing between 30-50 types of vegetables, permanent planting: includes productive hedgerows, orchards, and small fruits, Cattle: the number of cattle depends on the available quantity and quality of grassland, pigs: maximum

of 25 piglets and 244 laying hens and 3-5 roosters, a maximum of 249 animals. The husbandry system of the chickens is based on a mobile laying and night shelter (the ‘chicken caravan’).

All members live within close proximity to the farm (within 10 km). Product distribution, including crops, meat and eggs, occurs at the farm on a weekly basis. This ensures that the products are always fresh, often harvested just before distribution. Accommodations vary by location, but generally include housing facilities such as a barn, farmhouse, or other covered housing. These spaces are often freely accessible to the members, allowing the board, workgroups, and committees the opportunity for on-site meetings. These spaces are also crucial for community building, serving as the community’s home base and the hub for organising various activities such as a harvest festival. The GMM often occurs at a separate (rented) location because it is often not feasible to accommodate 500 people on-site.

3.3 Herenboeren Nederland (the umbrella organisation)

HB NL derives its legitimacy primarily from the added value it provides to the 18 Herenboerderijen and 35 citizen-led initiatives, effectively making HB NL a cooperative of cooperatives. Like most modern civil society organisations, HB NL has a flat hierarchy with a team- and project-based structure guided by flexible peer decision-making processes. Both the governance structure and the way in which the facilitation and support of individual cooperatives occur are outlined in the model below (Figure 4).

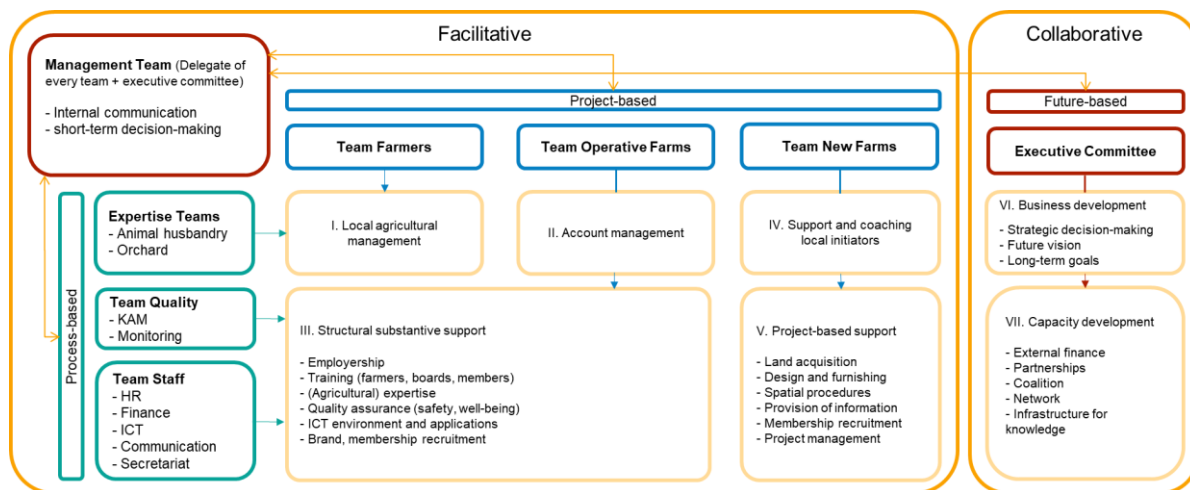


FIGURE 4 INTERNAL ORGANISATION STRUCTURE OF HB NL

HB NL consists of three project teams: Team Farmers includes all farmers employed by HB NL and seconded to the CFCs. This group has become a close-knit community, engaging in regular contact due to facing similar challenges. They also see each other during the farmer training program organised by HB NL. Team Operative Farms supports existing farms and focuses on developing means to strengthen the relationship between the cooperatives and HB NL. Each CFC has an assigned relationship manager from this team. Team New Farms focuses on realising new Herenboerderijen by supporting the 35 current citizen-led initiatives. Working with local initiators, they navigate through five phases for the development of a Herenboerderij. In addition to these project-based teams, there are three teams that operate more process-oriented. The ‘Staff’ handles HR matters and plays a crucial role in internal communication within HB NL and towards the CFCs. Team Quality primarily supports the cooperatives through direct contact with farmers and by developing and supplying materials to the CFC, Team Operative Farms, and Team New farms to ensure continuous improvement and on-site safety. Due to specific areas where the CFCs require additional support, two expertise teams have been established, consisting of experts, farmers, and others working collaboratively to address issues related to animal husbandry and orchards. In addition to these teams, there is an Executive Committee comprising three members, primarily engaged in developing a long-term vision, building partnerships, and attracting

external financiers. To ensure coordination between the teams, a Management Team has been established, consisting of the executives' members and representatives from the teams. Moreover, team meetings are organised to gather all employees and teams, facilitating discussions on crucial matters and fostering stronger connections among team members.

This appears to be a well-structured internal organisation, but in reality, tasks and roles undergo frequent and continuous changes. As a result, employees often lack clarity about each other's responsibilities and the adopted procedures or strategies. This also leads to uncertainty for the boards, farmers, and other active members about the points of contact within HB NL and where inquiries should be directed. Since the end of 2023, HB NL has made significant efforts to address this issue through a restructuring of the internal organisation. This includes introducing more structure through the implementation of a clear annual plan, project- and process ownership, and strategies for e.g. project proposals, along with a decision-making framework for the teams.

In addition to directly facilitating the Herenboerderijen and steering the future direction of the movement HB NL is also actively seeking cooperation with parties that want to shape the food system of tomorrow. The aim is to collectively define the use of 700,000 hectares of rural areas where food production occurs in a nature-driven, socially connected, and economically sustainable manner. To reach this goal and to accelerate the wider agro-food sustainability transition the Herenboeren movement is developing a network/infrastructure of Peerhubs; physical 'places' where practice and research come together to create farms for the future. These are intended to be safe, trust-building spaces not affiliated with the government or the agriculture industry, serving as places where farmers, citizens, entrepreneurs, researchers, and artists can come together to work on the transition of our food system. This learning, debating, cultural, and research centre brings together practice, theory, and imagination to contribute to a nature-driven, socially connected, and economically sustainable food system. The first 'Place' has already been established at De Kleine Aarde in Boxtel. The external cooperation and the development of this 'stimulating environment' of Peerhubs is controlled and overseen by the executive committee. For this reason, it is mentioned here under the banner of HB NL. In reality there is a wide variety of people involved from within the Herenboeren movement and outside.

4. Methodology

This chapter delves into the philosophical foundation of the research, the research strategy, and the methods of data collection and analysis to explain how the research will be conducted. The last sections address the trustworthiness of the research and ethical considerations.

4.1 Philosophy of Science

Every academic research is based on a generalised view of the world, representing the researchers underlying philosophical perspective which is defined as “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Moon & Blackman, 2014, p. 1173). Within the realm of research philosophy, various paradigms exist, spanning from positivism at one end to constructivism at the opposite extreme. The position depends on the ontological, epistemological, and methodological stance adopted. Ontology relates to beliefs about the fundamental nature of reality and what entities exist within it. Epistemology is about the connection between the researcher and the research, exploring questions concerning the essence of knowledge and how it is formulated. Finally, methodological inquiries revolve around how a researcher systematically seeks to acquire knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

In line with the L-A-P approach and the perspective provide by Crevani et al. (2010), this research is grounded in a constructionist epistemology and a process-ontology. The constructionist epistemology posits that individuals actively construct their understanding and knowledge of the world through their experiences, interactions, and cognitive processes (Moon & Blackman, 2014). This perspective challenges the passive notion of discovering or representing knowledge and instead emphasizes its active creation and shaping by human cognition and social interactions (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). This viewpoint is closely intertwined with the concept of process-ontology, which asserts that the fundamental nature of reality consists of dynamic processes or events rather than static entities. In essence, it conceives the world as a constantly changing system where events or processes are the fundamental components of reality (Crevani et al., 2010).

This philosophy served as the foundational framework to associate leadership with an ongoing flow of processes, where material-discursive engagements give rise to emergent meanings. It emphasises the significance of comprehending and interpreting human behaviour, culture, and society in a nuanced and subjective manner. This approach stands in contrast to positivism, which seeks objectivity and quantifiability by applying natural science methods to social science (Moon & Blackman, 2014). In this research, theory did not serve as the initial guide but was employed to understand, explore, and describe the social practice of leadership. The primary interest was to observe what unfolds in the interactions among actors, their activities, and material arrangements. Therefore, interpretivist forms of inquiry were employed, utilising discursive, narrative, and ethnographic approaches that emphasise thick description and diverse modes of capturing the dialogical and practice activity concurrently, acknowledging its complexity and ambiguity (Crevani et al., 2010). Instead of solely relying on meanings, deduced from observations, in this research, participants were also encouraged to offer their interpretations of their interactions. Within the interpretivist school of thought, the adopted approach aligns with the phenomenological tradition. Here, meaning production and reproduction occur intersubjectively through social interactions and the knowledge derived from social reality (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). Consequently, practice is viewed as an ongoing process within a constantly shifting and evolving complex dynamic social web. This allowed for the examination of situated micro-processes of social interaction, employing qualitative research methods such as interviews and observations to get a detailed understanding of the social practice of leadership.

To adhere to these ontological and epistemological standpoints, two guiding values were formulated:

1. The research constitutes an emancipatory aspect, aimed at articulating and questioning commonly accepted perceptions of leadership. The primary rationale behind this guiding value lied in the fact that leadership is a widely recognised and deeply ingrained concept within society. Often, individuals lean towards established notions of leadership when shaping their daily leadership activities (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). In practical terms, the emancipatory aspect responds to the tendency of leadership theories to include certain individuals while excluding others. By examining leadership practices and interactions within the context of local cultural dynamics and by remaining open to a diverse range of voices and interpretations, the ‘generalization trap’ was tried to be avoided and helped address El Bilali (2019b) critique that limiting the range of actors provides a narrow and rather apolitical lens on processes of change.
2. The prevailing discourse about the nature and characteristics of leadership is an integral part of this study. Leadership research is intertwined with a societal discourse that views leadership as an attribute of an individual. Consequently, social practice of leadership involves interactions relating to such notions. Especially leadership interactions as remembered and recounted by individuals relate to such notions.

Working from and for the Margins

My dual role as a researcher and an active participant in the Herenboeren movement underscores the integration of research and activism, shaping my approach towards driving meaningful change and ensuring the relevance and representativeness of research outcomes. Since 2021, I have been employed by HB NL, with my primary focus on monitoring and advising the CFCs for continuous development. Adhering to a traditional research philosophy, rooted in positivism, this would compromise objectivity, thus posing a potential weakness in my approach. I hold a different perspective on this matter. As a critical agrarian researcher, I firmly advocate for the integration of research and activism (Edelman & Wolford, 2017). I believe that research should play a pivotal role in driving meaningful change—a task often challenging for outsiders. Being part of the object of inquiry has several advantages. It provided me with an insider’s perspective, allowing for a more inclusive representation of diverse voices and experiences within the Herenboeren movement. It also helped me to gather rich, nuanced data that might be challenging for an outsider to access. This significantly enhanced the quality and depth of my research findings. Moreover, my involvement in the AFN enabled the direct application of research insights, leading to more targeted interventions that contributed to the network’s success and sustainability. In this vein, an advisory report is developed to ensure the research’s value is fully realised and that the Herenboeren movement is well equipped to make informed decisions that drive positive outcomes. The advisory report begins by examining the research scope and presenting key findings, then proceeds to address specific areas for improvement, along with associated challenges and customized recommendations. Finally, it concludes with a summary and final recommendation. This report is provided in Dutch to facilitate accessibility and mitigate the potential for misinterpretation. The advisory report is included in this research report as Appendix 2. The dual role as researcher and participant also cultivated trust and collaboration; members and employees of HB NL felt much more comfortable sharing their experiences and insights, knowing that I am genuinely committed to the network’s goals. In summary, working from and for the margins helped ensure that the research outcomes were relevant, representative, and instrumental in driving positive change in the Herenboeren movement.

In order to drive meaningful change a separate advisory report will be developed based on a yet-to-be-conducted assessment of the organisation’s needs (target group, the level of pragmatism, themes, etc.) The recommendations from the advisory report, along with the primary research findings, will be presented in detail during an upcoming team day of HB NL.

4.2 Research Strategy

This research followed a case-study strategy. In line with the interpretivist perspective of this research the case-study approach of Stake (1978) was adopted. Stake's approach aims to uncover understanding and meaning of experiences in a specific context. To understand the object of inquiry "requires experiencing the activity of the case as it occurs in its context and in its particular situation" (Harrison et al., 2017, p. 18). Studying the object of inquiry situationally enabled an examination of the integrated system in which it unfolds. Since knowledge is relative to the time and context, this case study aimed to understand, explore, and describe a specific phenomenon (Van Thiel, 2014). To enhance comprehension of the complex social phenomena of leadership, the method of triangulation was used, utilising multiple sources and methods for data collection. Simultaneously, this enhanced validity and reliability, as statements about leadership-as-entity were based on cross-verifying information from the different sources (Yin, 2018).

For data-collection, qualitative methods were used, with a primary focus on non-participatory observations and in-depth interviews, as they offer in-depth insights (Stake, 1978). Additionally, a few participant observations were conducted. Direct interpretation and the categorical and thematic grouping of findings were used for data analysis (Harrison et al., 2017). The strategy for this research aligns with what Yin (2018) refers to as 'the embedded-single case design'. The single case in this study is the Herenboeren movement. The embedded cases are the CFCs and HB NL. Within these cases, social interactions were examined in different settings. The embedded cases represent maximal variation cases. Which, according to Flyvbjerg (2006), are perfect "To obtain information about the significance of various circumstances for case process and outcome" (p. 34).

4.3 Research Methods

Based on the philosophical grounding in interpretivism and the case study design, data collection was based on a secondary desk research, in-depth interviews, and semi-structured observations. The sections below elaborate on the strategy of data collection and analysis.

4.3.1 Sampling

My active involvement in the Herenboeren movement presents an opportunity to collect a significant and diverse range of data. This opportunity was utilised by conducting 10 non-participatory observations in diverse contexts, 10 in-depth interviews with various actors involved, and 6 participant observations. To maintain pragmatism, a non-probability sampling strategy was followed. Van Thiel (2014) defined a non-probability sample as "A sample in which the units of study are selected consciously and purposively" (p. 182). Selection of interviewees and events for the observations were based on the expectation that processes of direction and co-orientation would take place. As an employee of HB NL, I have a strong understanding of the organisation, internal processes and interactions. Therefore, it was expected that the selected units of study were suitable for the research objective. During the data collection process, it became clear that one selected participant was not suitable, a new study unit was selected through snowball sampling. A non-probability sampling strategy was also followed for the selection of literature for the desk research.

4.3.2 Desk Research

Despite my extensive knowledge of the Herenboeren movement, a document analysis was conducted to identify the stated aims and objectives of this AFN and provide a detailed understanding of the organisation and governance structure, along with the involved actors. The online environment (SharePoint) of HB NL and the websites of various Herenboerderijen were utilised for this purpose. It is important to note that the insights from the document analysis were used for the case description (Chapter 3).

4.3.3 In-depth Interviews

The second phase of the data collection process involved conducting 10 in-depth interviews with a semi-structured format. Selection was based on the expectation that participants are often involved in leadership processes and are capable of communicating their own interpretations, providing detailed descriptions of specific moments of social interaction. During the selection process, participants were also placed within the organisational structure to ensure a diverse representation of actors. Thus, the selection process bears characteristics of a representative sample (Van Thiel, 2014). Tables 1 and 2 present an overview of the conducted interviews.

Interviewee	Function	Team(s)	Primary focus of social interaction (in addition to own teams/committee)
Respondent 1	COO	Executive committee	Management team and commission governance
Respondent 2	Relationship manager new farms & coordinator concept development	Team New farms and Management Team	Contact persons from the 35 citizen-led initiatives & 18 cooperatives and project group Concept development
Respondent 3	Quality management	Team Quality	Farmers, KAM coordinators at the farm-level and research institutions
Respondent 4	Internal communication	Team STAF	Employees HB NL and communication software developers
Respondent 5	IT support	Team STAF	Employees HB NL and software engineers

TABLE 1 ANONYMOUS INTERVIEWEES HB NL

Name interviewee	Function	Responsibility
Respondent 6	Farmer	Operational farm management (production)
Respondent 7	Member community-based committees	Advising the board on a specific matter
Respondent 8	Member community-based working group	Supporting the farmer in the field
Respondent 9	Board member	Daily management and organizing decision-making
Respondent 10	Chairperson	Daily management and organizing decision-making

TABLE 2 ANONYMOUS INTERVIEWEES CFCs

The interviews were conducted to gather information about the perceptions and experiences of participants regarding the role of leadership within the movement, the competencies, meanings, and materials being utilised during the performance of leadership, and the impact of the governance and organisational structure of the cooperative/HBNL. As expected, responses were often framed within the prevailing discourse about leadership. While gathering such information is interesting, the focus was also on gaining insights into the micro-processes of social interaction. To collect data about processes of direction and co-orientation, the interviewees were asked to describe collaboration and teamwork, decision-making, responsibilities, challenges, and appreciation and recognition with reference to specific events. When the interviewees started talking about a specific event (e.g., a meeting), the STARR-technique was used as guideline to direct the response, asking about the **S**ituation, **T**asks, **A**ctions, **R**esults, and **R**eflection.

To maintain internal validity an interview manual was developed (Van Thiel, 2014). This manual was used as a guideline for conducting the interviews. It comprises a number of fixed elements: an introduction, topics, questions and a concluding section (Van Thiel, 2014). For each question, one or more follow-up questions were formulated to ensure the right data was collected. After conducting a pilot interview with an honest and trustworthy respondent, the manual was revised. To ensure the new interview manual functioned properly, a second pilot interview was conducted with the same respondent.

4.3.5 Non-participatory Observations

Next and central in the process of data collection were observations. Observing the environment directly allows more accurate and authentic data and yields detailed information about the context that can be challenging to capture through interviews (Clark et al., 2021). As Clifton and colleagues point out “post-

hoc accounts of how leadership is perceived to happen provide only limited insights into how leadership actually happens as in situ social practice” (Clifton et al., 2020, p. 3). In total 10 observations were conducted in a non-participatory manner to grasp the performance of leadership in the real life setting and to limit alterations. The selection of events for observation was based on variation in the leadership-related context (actor engagement, internal organisation dynamics and spatial-temporal aspects). Table 3 present an overview of the observed events.

Event	No.	Actor engagement	(Internal) organisation dynamics	Spatial-temporal aspects
General Member Meeting	2	All members of the consumer food cooperative	The highest decision-making body within the cooperative	On-farm physical meeting (100+ people)
Community-based committee meeting	1	Members committee + farmer	Advices the board of the cooperative	On-farm physical meeting (5-10 people)
Quarterly communication meeting	1	Staff communication HB NL + members of citizens-led initiatives and representatives of locale communication committees	Plays a crucial role in fostering collaboration, communication, and the successful execution of project	Online meeting (20 people)
Different team meetings (HB NL)	3	All members of the specific team	Pragmatic problem-solving, coordination and the successful execution of project	Online meetings (3-7 people)
Team day HB NL	1	All employees of HB NL	Teambuilding + update about progress	Physical meeting at DKA
Chairman's meeting	1	Chairmans of all operative farms and supervision of HB NL	Fostering collaboration between the cooperatives and with HB NL + updating about progress	Online meeting (18 people)
Trainings day farmers	1	All Farmers + Experts and supervision HB NL	Structural substantive support HB NL	On-farm physical training (15-30 people)

TABLE 3 OVERVIEW OF OBSERVED EVENTS

To remain open to a diverse range of voices and interpretations while maintaining some control, the observations were semi-structured. Only a loose strategy for observation and documentation was formulated.

All moments of social interaction, expected to be relevant, were documented through written notes. Particularly, detailed documentation and, when possible, recordings were made for social interactions that gave rise to micro-processes of direction and co-orientation. After the observations, the written notes were further elaborated. To capture different dimensions of the relational realities two tables were completed. In the first table, short descriptions, analytical memos & comments, and fieldnotes were provided for the 9 dimensions of observations by Spradley (2016) (space, actors, activities, objects, acts, events, time, goals, and feelings). In the second table, the same approach was taken, but in this case, the dimensions were focused on social interactions (communication patterns, leadership dynamics, group cohesion, conflict level, decision-making processes, division of roles, emotional expression, group norms, identity and inclusion, external influences, change and development, and feedback and evaluation).

4.3.6 Participant Observations

For this research 6 participant observations were conducted. Participant observation is regarded as the method through which the researcher generates data by observing and recording what they see, hear and experience while participating in the activities of the community (Laurier, 2010). It is not an external method imposed on research subjects, and participant observations have no predetermined formal steps. The activities included two working days on the farm, participating in two weekly farm pick-up moments, and attending 2 events organised to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Herenboeren movement. Engagement in these activities contributed to the creation of thick descriptions and facilitated conversations with members of the CFCs about their experiences, beliefs, and aspirations.

4.4 Data Analysis

The initial drafts of transcripts were machine generated. To verify accuracy, the audio was listened on delay and cross-referenced with the generated transcripts. During this process, the transcripts were naturalised; filler words, repetitions were removed, and grammatical errors corrected. Sometimes sentences were rephrased for clarity. This process is often referred to as intelligent transcription (McMullin, 2023). Additionally, written notes were converted into a digital format (Word-documents and Excel-tables for the observations).

After transcription, the data were processed, coded, and analysed using the qualitative data analysis tool Atlas.ti. The coding process comprised six steps: open coding, marking text segments with sub-codes

describing the content. Subsequently, the self-devised codes were categorised based on common elements. Then, the concepts, elaborated on in the theoretical framework and conceptual model were used as umbrella codes to arrange the categories and sub-codes, shedding light on the similarities and connections between the sub-codes, categories, and the umbrella codes. To ensure consistency and coherence, a codebook was compiled, documenting all umbrella codes. Next, selective coding was conducted, focusing on the most salient outcomes. Finally, a code framework was developed to increase transparency (Van Thiel, 2014). The code framework is included in the research report as Appendix 1.

4.5 Trustworthiness

Case study research has grown in sophistication and is considered a legitimate form of inquiry to explore a broad scope of complex issues, particularly when following an interpretivist approach in which human behaviour and social interactions are central to understanding the topic of inquiry (Harrison et al., 2017). However, studies with a case study design are often criticised for lacking scientific rigor (McGloin, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Van Thiel, 2014 Clark et al., 2021). A typical objection raised about case study research is that it falls short of validity and reliability (Yin, 2018). According to Clark et al. (2021) these criteria lie uncomfortable with the interpretivist orientation as they assume that only one single reality exists. He suggests instead to refer to trustworthiness which is made up of four criteria: credibility which parallels internal validity, transferability which parallels external validity, dependability which parallels reliability and confirmability which parallels objectivity (Clark et al., 2021). Table 4 present an overview of the strategies applied to enhance the trustworthiness.

Criteria of trustworthiness	Strategies
Credibility	Triangulation, Respondent validation
Transferability	Thick descriptions, Comprehensive case-description
Dependability	Robust methodological framework, Establishment of a chain of evidence
Confirmability	Reflexive stance, Data accesibility

TABLE 4 STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE TRUSTWORTHINESS

To enhance credibility, several sources of evidence were used to generate the results; this is called triangulation (Van Thiel, 2014). This facilitated the supply of sufficient citations, thick descriptions and helped achieve respondent validation. The use of interviews and observations with an (semi)open format helped capture diverse modes of social interactions. Therefore, not only leadership was measured, but also other significant social interactions and the influence of internal organisation dynamics and actor involvement. The external validity is low during the single case study design. However, this is not problematic, because, following an interpretivist approach, knowledge is viewed as relative to the time and context of the study. To provide readers with evidence that the findings could be applicable to other contexts, situations and times, transferability was enhanced through a comprehensive case description, extensive use of thick descriptions, illustrations, examples from practice, and quotes. Reliability, or in this research, dependability, is high due to a robust methodological framework, the commitment to obtaining a representative sample and establishing a chain of evidence through detailed field notes, the use of recording devices, and the transcription of recorded files (Riege, 2003). The execution of the research by one individual ensured consistency in the interpretation of the data. In line with the epistemology of constructivism confirmation biases could not be ruled out. A reflexive stance was embraced throughout the research process to manage the openly acknowledged subjectivity (Harrison et al., 2017). Making all collected data available and accessible to the assessor also enhanced transparency (Jonker & Pennink, 2009). The collective implementation of these strategies articulates a justifiable framework for the research and enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings.

Furthermore, the interviews offered a valuable contribution but as Clifton et al. (2020) mentions “post-hoc accounts of how leadership is perceived to happen provide only limited insights into how leadership

is actually performed” (p. 3). Hence the extensive use of data generated during the interviews had a negative effect on the credibility and dependability. However, higher validity was difficult to attain due to the limited research period and the brought scope of the case.

4.6 Research Ethics

Ethics is linked to taking action and avoiding harm for the benefit of others (Arifin, 2017). In qualitative research it is of particular importance to guarantee the safety and protection of participants because of the close researcher/participant relationship, the subjective interpretations of the researcher and the design itself (Orb et al., 2001). Several measures were implemented to prevent ethical issues. All participants were required to provide written informed consent. Potential participants were approached individually and provided with an explanation of the study’s purpose and the data collection process. They were given sufficient time to ask questions and address concerns. It was also clarified that, given the voluntary nature of their participation, there are no implications for refusing to participate or withdrawing from the study while in progress. To avoid ethical issues and internal conflicts, anonymity and confidentiality was maintained throughout the process of data collection, analysis, and reporting of the findings (Arifin, 2017).

5. Results

In this chapter, the main findings from the interviews and observations are described. These findings are based on data obtained through 10 in-depth interviews, 10 naturalistic observations, and 6 participant observations. Starting with elaborating on leadership-as-entity, followed by an extensive review of the meanings, competences and materials utilised during the performance of leadership. Next delving into the perceptions and experiences of network participants regarding internal organisational dynamics. The chapter ends with an explanatory section about the direct impact of the observed practice of leadership in terms of positive- and negative effects and the contribution to agency.

It is important to note that quotes from the interviews and observations, conducted in Dutch, have been freely translated into English.

5.1 Leadership-as-entity: A Conjunction of Elements

This section comprises a brief overview of the main findings about the social practice of leadership by uniting the building blocks of the social practice of leadership—the meanings, competences, and materials. Not by creating a complex web of links and connections but by describing and elaborating on leadership-as-entity—a recognizable conjunction of elements that can be spoken about and, more importantly, drawn upon as a set of resources when performing the practice (Shove et al., 2012).

It explains that leadership in the Herenboeren movement is perceived as a distributed and shared phenomenon, emphasising inclusivity, moral guidance, and autonomy, reflecting servanthood and self-steering. During processes of direction and co-orientation organisational, relational, and communicative skills, as well as specialised knowledge, are being utilised. This highlights adaptability, strategic thinking, and meaningful connections. Additionally, during leadership interactions, diverse materials, such as people, communication tools, and physical working environments are present. Figure 5 presents an overview of the conjunction of the three elements.

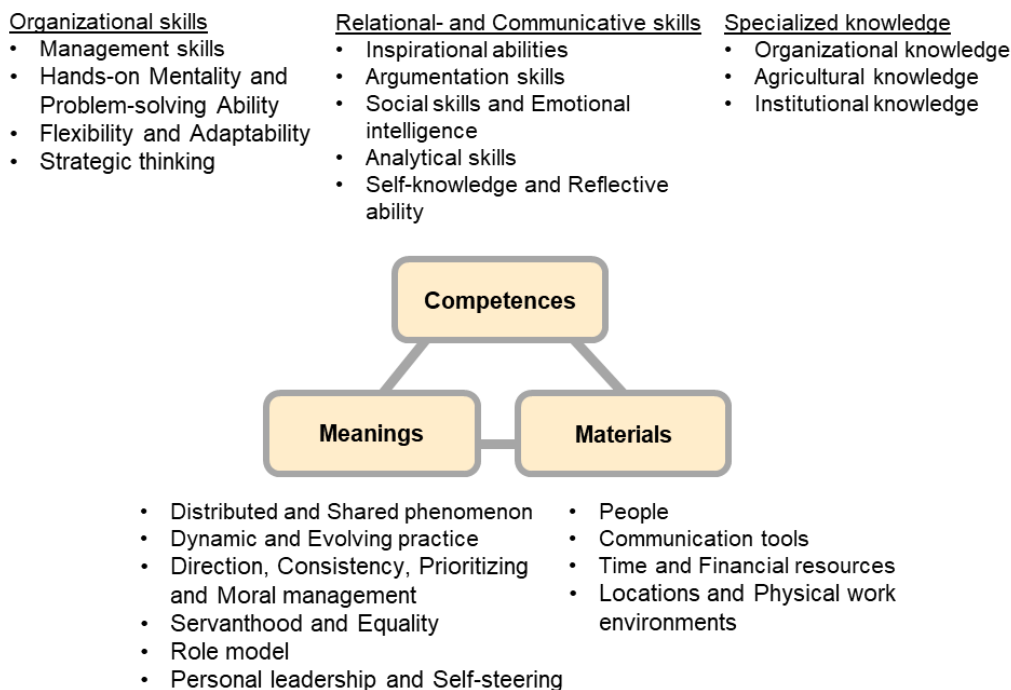


FIGURE 5 LEADERSHIP-AS-ENTITY

To enhance the reader's comprehension, a concise summary of the three elements is presented.

Meanings

Leadership within the Herenboeren movement emerges as a nuanced interplay of diverse meanings. It is fundamentally a distributed and shared phenomenon, reflecting aspects of the shared-, distributed-, and relational leadership models, emphasising collective engagement and community involvement. The dynamic and evolving nature of leadership highlights adaptability, responsiveness to change and dynamic agreement on goals, acknowledging the ever-changing nature of the AFS and the wider landscape. This aligns with the notion that leadership is indeed a practice that is performed during processes of social interaction. Moral management forms a compass, guiding actions with ethical purpose. Servanthood and equality become integral, portraying leadership as a selfless practice committed to fostering inclusivity, understanding diverging arguments and collaborative problem-solving—reflecting attributes of servant leadership. The role model aspect illustrates the influential power in shaping behaviours and values, reflecting the idea of transformational leadership. Additionally, personal leadership and self-steering underscore autonomy, emphasising individual action within the broader collective narrative. This mirrors self-leadership, which is about the individual's intrinsic motivation generated by feelings of competence.

Competences

Leadership in the Herenboeren movement embodies a wide spectrum of competences, merging organisational skills, relational- and communicative skills and specialised knowledge. Organisational skills, marked by management and hands-on problem-solving, help keep the farm running. Flexibility, adaptability, and strategic thinking facilitate navigation through the dynamic landscape. Relational- and communicative skills fosters meaningful connections. In this regard, inspirational abilities and emotional intelligence are most important. Analytical skills underpin decision-making, complemented by self-awareness and reflective capacity. Specialised knowledge, spanning organisational, agricultural, and institutional domains, forms the bedrock for successful engagement in leadership interactions.

Materials

In the Herenboeren movement, the 'materials' element is an intricate interplay of physical bodies, communication tools, time, and financial resources, as well as physical work environments and locations. People, represent the carriers or host of the practice. The leadership interactions primarily involve specific individuals with formal roles, such as the farm manager, the farm board, the chairman of the cooperative, and employees, particularly the executive committee of HB NL. However, the practice encompasses a more diverse group of people across the organisation, each contributing different skills, perspectives, and collaborative efforts. Communication tools function as connective tissues, facilitating the exchange of ideas and information essential for effective steering, as well as promoting inclusivity and transparency. Time and financial resources act as constraining component shaping the involvement of actors and the nature and frequency of leadership interactions. Locations and physical work environments form the spatial backdrop, influencing the practical manifestation, stimulating, and facilitating community involvement and the overall quality of leadership interactions.

Connecting the Dots

From this analysis, it is evident that the practice of leadership is in line with the new leadership paradigm. The three premises formulated by James (2011) remain valid: Leadership involves multiple actors, is distributed across the organisational hierarchy, and is understood in terms of practices and processes of social interaction.

The description of leadership-as-entity aligns with the two guiding values of this research. By referencing various leadership styles and linking the practice to specific actors—the prevailing discourse about the nature and characteristics of leadership is acknowledged as an integral part of the subject of inquiry. It is crucial to note that these references serve to aid the reader in understanding the components of the social

practice of leadership. Simultaneously, adherence to the emancipatory approach is maintained, challenging widely accepted perceptions of leadership by illustrating that within the Herenboeren movement, leadership cannot be encapsulated solely in terms of leader attributes and leader-follower relationships.

5.2 Performing Leadership: Unpacking Meanings, Competences, and Materials

To substantiate the concise summary, presented in the previous section, the following paragraph provides an extensive review of the general meanings, competences, and materials of the social practice of leadership, incorporating quotes and examples from practice. The social practice of leadership was examined in the two ways proposed by Crevani et al. (2010): as they happen in real time and as they are remembered and recounted by individuals. This was achieved by observing leadership interactions, including processes of direction and co-orientation, and conducting interviews.

5.2.1 Meanings: A distributed and Shared Phenomenon

Meanings is about interpretations and understandings of the social practice of leadership; including symbolic meanings, ideas, emotions, beliefs and insights related to the activity (Shove et al., 2012).

The prevailing discourse about the nature and characteristics of leadership is clearly visible in the associations and interpretations of leadership—the idea that leadership is an attribute of the individual. Noteworthy is that all respondents, without exception, characterise leadership as a phenomenon distributed among various individuals within the organisation. At times, references were made to formal positions such as ‘chairman’, ‘coordinator’, ‘directive’, ‘board’, or ‘agricultural/farm manager’. However, the primary emphasis was placed on the contributions and engagement of individuals in specific tasks or aspects of work, regardless of their formal position. A member of a CFC remarked:

Leadership, to me, is primarily a role within an organisation or community. We are increasingly realising that what the literature states about leadership does not necessarily apply to modern organisations. Leadership is not a specific function, or position. It’s a role that can be undertaken by anyone within the organisation, even at lower levels, as long as they feel a sense of ownership for a particular task.

Moreover, the observations revealed that within certain groups, such as teams, committees, working groups, and boards, the acts of leading and following are occurring simultaneously and is shared across time and actors—individuals are both leading and following. A notable example was observed during a community-based committee meeting, since the coordinator was on vacation, a committee member took on the responsibility of scheduling a new meeting and preparing the agenda. During the meeting, when the coordinator returned, he thanked the committee member for organising and then took charge to address the agenda items. These interpretations align with the distributed- and shared leadership styles (see pg. 17). Notably, during the interviews, a few individuals used the term ‘diffused’. Since diffused is often used to describe something scattered or spread without clear boundaries, its use could imply unclear accountability and ambiguity in roles and responsibilities.

Dynamic and Evolving Practice

Employees of HB NL have noted that significant changes have occurred in the way leadership is being practiced. Respondents expressed that this is, and should be, embedded in the movement’s thoughts and strategy regarding leadership. During an informal conversation, an employee highlighted: “The movement operates in a dynamic field where numerous factors contribute to continuous change. This includes not only political and economic aspects but also changes within the movement itself. I am not just referring to growth, but also to the evolving needs of cooperatives; this requires a continuous

adjustment of the guidance provided by HB NL”. This implies that leadership should be dynamic, adaptive, and strategic to effectively navigate the intricate and ever-evolving conditions both within and outside the movement.

In the last years the movement witnessed dynamic changes in leadership, from varied executive styles to the appointment of an operational director and adaptive shifts in the role of agricultural managers across the CFCs. In the initial pioneer phase, there were two executive members: one practiced transformational leadership—inspiring and motivating people by setting and communicating a long-term vision and goals for changing the food system. The other executive member predominantly practiced autocratic leadership—a single individual making decisions with little input from others, particularly in the realm of resource allocation. However, during the period 2021-2023, it became evident that more guidance, in terms of internal organisation, was necessary to accommodate growth. One respondent talked about: “Connecting the short stroke with the long-term vision”. To address this, an operational director was appointed. Under his guidance, significant changes were implemented in the internal organisation and governance. However, within a year of his appointment, he departed as it became clear that a director with an agricultural background would be better suited to oversee operational matters and improve the relationship with the CFCs. The dynamic and evolving nature of leadership is also evident within the CFCs—changes in the role of the agricultural manager are observed in all visited CFCs (10 out of the 18). While the Herenboerderij blueprint initially designated one single farmer as the agricultural manager, nowadays, this role is filled by two or even three farmers who share and distribute tasks and responsibilities. Additionally, a prevailing belief is observed—leadership should adapt to the developmental stage of the farm. This aligns with the broader understanding that leadership should be contextually responsive and adaptive to the evolving needs of the organisation. One respondent, who has been the chairman of a CFC since its establishment, highlighted the need for different skill sets at various stages of organisational development and a willingness to adapt roles and responsibilities accordingly:

I really love that process of development. Now that it's up and running, I see a different role for myself. I envision myself more as a catalyst. At this time, you need more people who will actually build a stable company. Personally, I am someone who loves starting new things, so I think it's time for me to pass the baton.

Establishing Direction, Consistency, Prioritising and Moral management

Interviewees emphasised the need for effective steering, particularly considering the diverse perspectives within the organisation. Leadership is associated with setting a particular course, defining the trajectory, and involving people in that process to align it with the aspirations of the communities. It involves developing a long-term vision and strategy, and the ability to make concrete, pragmatic choices and directional decisions that need to be made. A board member of a CFC remarked:

What do you want for your own farm, huh? You also need to set the direction and gather what members want. So, it's also about shaping your own farm. And, furthermore, you also have to consider, you know, how will that farm develop in the future? With all the weeds, how are you going to handle that? Should you even consider spraying? The same goes for our cattle. What are you going to do with them? Which direction are you taking with such an organisation? How do you shape that? Yes, who is involved in that? Who does what?

The questions posed by the board member (“How do you shape that? Yes, who is involved in that? Who does what?”) highlight the collaborative and inclusive nature of leadership. It suggests that effective leadership involves not only making decisions but also understanding the involvement of various actors and allocating responsibilities. Such an understanding of leadership fits well with the organisational model of the Herenboerderij, which is build upon the idea of collective ownership.

The importance of involvement was highlighted in several ways. Interviewees suggest that while you can set a certain course, for successful implementation, it is crucial to involve specific individuals and ensure that everyone is informed about the direction. A community member stated: “Merely formulating is not enough. For success, it is crucial that you dedicate sufficient time to informing and involving people in the establishment of direction”. A chairman of a CFC made an important remark: “It is important to listen to everyone and be able to give equal attention to all sides of the story. But it is also crucial not to go with every wind. In the sense of, you must have a clear vision of where we ultimately want to go, assess whether this discussion still serves the purpose, and be firm in that regard”.

Several interviewees also emphasised the importance of consistency. Within HB NL, consistency in decision-making was lacking. As the movement and the number of employees of HB NL grew, it became evident that continuous revisions and adjustments had a significant impact on work-efficiency. To illustrate, I was asked to write a factsheet on monitoring, which was subsequently not implemented because there might be a different approach to monitoring in the future. The result is that 4 hours were invested in developing a factsheet that is currently not being used. In addition to efficiency concerns, board members of the CFC and the directive of HB NL also indicate that inconsistency in decision-making leads to inertia and compromise’s reliability. The response from the operational director of HB NL provides a good summary of the negative consequences that arise when there is no consistency in decision-making:

If you question previous decisions every time, you will create slowness. Furthermore, if you make an agreement and then question it again a week later, as management, you apparently accept that this is possible, and employees in the organisation will do the same. So, agreements cease to be agreements, making it more challenging to run an organisation together. As you grow larger, you can’t overturn everything at the last minute or one minute to midnight. There needs to be a certain level of planning.

In addition to setting direction, inclusivity, and maintaining consistency, the importance of continuous prioritisation was emphasised by the interviewees and was clearly visible during the observations. Prioritisation is crucial within every organisation, but it holds particular significance for non-profit organisations that inherently operate with limited financial resources. It allows them to navigate the challenges of limited resources while maximizing their positive contributions to the community and striving to effect change within the current system. An employee of HB NL comments:

Prioritisation for any organisation with limited resources is always a conversation. The highest quality of a conversation is when you can collectively reach one consensus based on what, at least within that group, is considered a degree of objectivity. And I think that should be a function of, well, what are our ambitions, what are the risks, and given those two, what has the most urgency in moving toward those strategic goals.

The concept of moral management is integral to the aspects of establishing direction, consistency, and prioritising. It encompasses ethical considerations, values, and the responsible use of resources. In the context of Herenboeren, the emphasis on setting direction aligns with a moral commitment to the shared values and aspirations of the community involved. Prioritisation becomes not just a practical necessity but a moral imperative, ensuring that limited resources are directed towards initiatives that contribute meaningfully to the community and align with the organisation’s mission. Involvement, as highlighted by interviewees, is not merely a procedural step but a moral duty to engage members in decision-making, fostering a sense of collective ownership and responsibility. Consistency, another key aspect, is not only an organisational efficiency concern but also a moral commitment to reliability and trustworthiness, crucial for sustaining relationships within the community. Continuous prioritisation, emphasised by interviewees and observed in practice, aligns with the moral responsibility of stewardship over limited

resources. This ongoing dialogue reflects a commitment to ethical decision-making, considering ambitions, risks, and strategic goals collectively.

A Democratic Foundation: Servanthood and Equality

The democratic foundation, and the norms and values of the community, are clearly visible in the meaning of leadership. Leadership is associated with servanthood, fostering collaboration, and active participation in operational aspects, and equality. All interviewees talked about serving and supporting the community, sometimes directly and sometimes with reference to teams, working groups or committees. Valuing their input and involving them in the decision-making process is often mentioned. Additionally, a servant approach is considered important to promote collaboration, trust, and a collective sense of responsibility, contributing to a positive and thriving organizational culture. In accordance with this, the observations demonstrate a continued focus on empathy, listening, and a commitment to the growth of others. In addition to servitude, leadership is also associated with the democratic principle of equality. Individuals with formal leadership roles indicate that they are just regular members and stress the importance of avoiding a sense of hierarchy. To put these democratic values into practice, chairpersons, farmers, and board members, in addition to their work behind the scenes, actively strive to be involved with operational aspects of the farm as much as possible. A chairman of a CFC remarked:

Well, I find it very important, as the chairman—I'm also just a regular member, right? So, I've been given the mandate for my role as chairman, but I'm also just a member. So, if I'm on the farm and I notice that we're out of bandages, well, I'll go grocery shopping that afternoon and pick up some bandages. You see, if a toilet needs cleaning and I happen to be the only one on the farm, then I'll just clean the toilets. So, I believe that especially in an organisation like the Herenboeren, you really need to demonstrate that you're all in it together. As a board member, you're also just a member. So, I think it's important as a board to actively contribute on the farm, show that you're involved, and understand what's happening on the farm. By spending a lot of time on the farm, you learn what is needed and what issues are at play.

Also, within HB NL, associations with servanthood have been observed. Employees emphasised that, in every action and decision, several questions are taken into consideration, including 'what contribution does this make to the CFC?', 'do the CFCs need this?', 'can the CFC effectively use this?'. One employee pointed out: "Serving the people on the ground, aiming to assist in the continuous improvement of the cooperatives. I think that's a very important characteristic of leadership within the Herenboeren movement, as Herenboeren Netherlands, you must always be open and ready to serve the cooperatives". Many of these interpretations of leadership align with the concept of 'servant leadership'. Some respondents explicitly refer to this term to describe leadership within the movement. Asking about the understanding of leadership in the context of the Herenboeren respondent 5 explained:

When contemplating leadership within the Herenboeren movement, I envision the concept of servant leadership. I don't associate it with strictness but rather with accepting a mantle of leadership from a specific ultimate responsibility to guide a group of people. Therefore, it entails attempting to make individuals maximally operational, both in terms of content and, I would almost say, mentally productive and resilient.

Role Model

Within the movement, 'being a role model' is understood as a pivotal aspect of leadership, encompassing active shaping of collective morale, serving as a visionary, spokesperson, and symbol for the organisation in the Dutch agro-food sustainability transition. Being a role model goes beyond merely managing frameworks and delves into the realm of actively shaping and upholding the collective morale. As one respondent puts it: "The exemplary role, a part of leading the way, ensuring that you manage more than just a substantive frame of reference, perhaps also upholding the collective morale by being conscious of its existence and ensuring that your behaviours reflect and support it". Here, leaders are

not just administrators; they are visionaries responsible for fostering a shared ethos that guides the community. In the movement, leadership is also associated with serving as a spokesperson and being a symbol for the organisation. The Herenboeren movement, for example, lobbied for all kinds of small-scale AFNs in political debates in The Hague. A similar trend was observed at the CFCs. An interviewee highlighted:

A chairman naturally serves as a kind of figurehead for such an organisation, right? Boudewijn handles this role well, doesn't he? He represents the community in communication with the farmer and HB NL. Additionally, he facilitates collaboration with the municipality, province, and addresses the local media. Being a figurehead both externally and within your own organisation is, of course, important.

This emphasises the public-facing aspect of leadership, where the chairman becomes a representative both externally and internally, playing a crucial role in shaping the image and identity of the organisation. Moreover, the Herenboeren movement acknowledges the responsibility that comes with increased visibility and influence. During a team meeting of HB NL, a member of the directive commented: “We are no longer a small movement; we are being observed from various angles. We have the responsibility to show the Netherlands that things can and should be done differently”. This statement reflects an awareness of the movement's growing significance and the commitment to showcasing a responsible and influential role in Dutch agro-food sustainability transition.

Personal leadership and Self-steering

HB NL employees tie leadership to roles, relying on self-steering and taking responsibility due to limited formal guidance. Community-based committees and working groups express a current lack of concrete guidance by the board and/or farmer, making it challenging for them to take effective action and make a meaningful contribution. The farmer and the board both acknowledge these concerns. At the same time, they emphasised that the farmer is already busy organising production, and the board consists of volunteers with limited available time: “Yeah, you know, I hear comments here and there like ‘I expect the board to do this, or the board should do that, right?’ But don't forget that the board members are volunteers, right? With a limited amount of time, right? Whether it's about membership recruitment or the quality of the soil”. A board member talks about personal leadership. He states that within this movement, everyone is considered a leader with corresponding responsibilities: “It's not just about boards or businesses. Leaders exist on a personal level, and everyone who is a member also has responsibilities. What can I contribute here? Do I have my eyes open enough to see what my contribution can be and what I can do?”. Employees of HB NL do not explicitly refer to personal leadership but often connect leadership to their own role and activities. Employees mentioned serving and providing support to the cooperatives when talking about their responsibilities. It appears that formal employment automatically results in feeling the responsibility to contribute. Frequently using concepts such as ‘self-steering’ and ‘taking responsibility’ can be seen as conformation of this assumption. In this context, employees indicated that the limited formal guidance, forces them to self-direct tasks, activities, and decision-making.

5.2.2 Competences: Social skills to Ignite the Heartbeat of the Farm

Is about the knowledge and skills needed to perform the social practice of leadership, which is often learned through experience and training (Shove et al., 2012).

5.2.2.1 Organisational skills

MANAGEMENT SKILLS

The realisation of a nature-driven, socially connected, and economically sustainable production system poses a significant challenge. For success, these three pillars must be in balance. Respondents indicated that this requires management skills, including effective planning and organisation of business operations. Respondent 7 remarked: “It is crucial that you can deploy the right resources, such as

machinery, funds, seeds, etc., and that you systematically incorporate them into the organisation. So, planning and organising are essential qualities, I believe. For me, this concerns the management aspect of agricultural business operations”. Different community members emphasised that with limited financial means, it is crucial to deploy resources in the right places and at the right times. During a farm visit, a member stated: “You can only spend your money once; as a Herenboerderij, there are no possibilities to obtain financial resources in the short term”. Farmers emphasised the importance of a well-thought-out and fully developed cultivation plan. One farmer mentioned: “Strictly following the cultivation plan and also creating a realistic cultivation plan is crucial; otherwise, you will be lagging behind”. Moreover, farmers refer to labour organisation. As some tasks require weekly attention, maintaining continuity is essential.

HANDS-ON MENTALITY AND PRAGMATIC PROBLEM-SOLVING ABILITY

As the Herenboerderij represents an entirely new concept, the cooperatives face new challenges on a weekly basis. Navigating the operations demands a hands-on mentality, a pragmatic attitude, and problem-solving skills. HB NL bears the responsibility to support and facilitate the cooperatives, assigning a role to HB NL in this regard as well. Respondent 3 elaborated: “What the practice demands on the farms is a short and rapid PDCA cycle because today it rains more than tomorrow or there is avian flu, then action must be taken rapidly. The consequence is that you have to pragmatically address day to day issues and devise solutions, of course within a certain structure and framework”. The practical implications of a hands-on mentality and pragmatic problem-solving ability are exemplified by a HB NL employee. She is involved in quality management, where safety is the baseline. She explained that she deals with practical problems on a weekly basis and provided an example of how she responds to a potential risk:

I have them almost weekly, in a way. If I look at what I've been dealing with in recent weeks, it's the root rot in the carrots, whether they can be delivered or not. Yes, or no? Well, then I consult with the farmer, asking, 'Can you send me a photo? What does it look like? What are you thinking? Do you have other products to deliver?' Then I delve into it further. Which bacteria is causing the rot? Does it pose any risks? What is being said about it? Subsequently, I start preparing a factsheet right away. The farmer can then share this with the members, assessing the vegetable crops, indicating that the carrots actually have a subpar score. Still, you deliver the crops because the risk assessment shows that there are no health risks associated. This way, you decide together with the farmer on how to proceed, ensuring that safety is still assured.

Moreover, she noted that within HB NL, the hands-on mentality is still lacking, even though HB NL has a responsibility to support the CFCs in addressing and resolving specific problems: “The big picture is now being carefully outlined, I believe, with the input of many people, but there is still insufficient attention given to addressing concrete practical problems”. In contrast to HB NL, it is evident that all individuals, actively contributing to the development of the cooperative, all exhibit a hands-on mentality and possess a high level of pragmatic problem-solving ability. This is expected, as the CFCs are directly confronted with these problems. Because immediate intervention is required there is no time for discussions with HB NL, conducting risk assessments, or drafting a factsheet. These are acute problems, such as an outbreak of the laying hens, the destruction of fences by a storm, or a defect cooling installation. To solve such problems, you need a hands-on mentality, pragmatic problem-solving skills, but also an innovative mindset. A farmer mentioned that the chicken run did not survive a spring storm. Fortunately, all the chickens were in the ‘chicken caravan’ (mobile laying and night shelter), preventing an outbreak. However, a quick solution was needed: “Without a run and with 250 chickens in the caravan, you're waiting for diseases, stress, unrest, and mortality”. The solution was found on the same day by installing the existing mobile walk-in greenhouse and taking measures to ensure animal welfare.

FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY

In the dynamic landscape of the Herenboeren movement, flexibility of mind and adaptability emerge as crucial attributes for success. A clear example of the need for flexibility arises in the narrative of a member of the executive committee. In weighing different governance models for the organisation, he underscored flexibility of mind and curiosity as essential elements: “You need to possess the flexibility of mind and curiosity to be able to step away from it. So, for me, option 1 is not the only choice, but it is the most apparent option in my own thinking. I am open to considering whether option 3 is feasible, and it could have been the selected option if there were compelling arguments for it. Therefore, you must maintain that flexibility of mind and curiosity to listen to what you hear and determine if it leads you to adjust your opinion”. This highlights the adaptive and open-minded approach required in leadership, particularly in considering different perspectives and adjusting opinions based on new information. Respondent 2 emphasised the constant change within the organisation and the importance of flexibility:

Yes, I believe that initially, you must genuinely be flexible and have a sense of responsibility. You should enjoy devising new solutions because many challenges arise for the first time. ‘Okay, how are we going to deal with this now?’ So, you need to be able to handle the fact that sometimes frameworks don’t exist yet, and you have to shape them together. Therefore, flexibility is, I think, super important because, within the two years that I’ve been working for Herenboeren, so much has already changed.

The demand for flexibility is closely tied to the ability to generate novel solutions for challenges that surface unexpectedly. In an environment without established frameworks, continual adaptation becomes crucial to navigate the ever-changing landscape. Individuals must tackle challenges that lack predefined solutions, showcasing the capacity to collaboratively shape frameworks. A farmer finally emphasised the importance of pragmatism and flexibility at the operational level:

When I look at my own work, often on Saturdays, for example, I handle the distribution. There’s always the question, how should we do this? Well, I’ll indicate how it should be done. But I am very flexible about it; I give people the freedom. Because, for me, it doesn’t matter whether the distribution happens in the sequence 1, 2, 3, or 3, 5, 6. As long as it runs smoothly, that’s what matters to me.

The farmer’s approach to handling distribution on Saturdays emphasises the importance of providing guidance while also being flexible and granting individuals the freedom to make decisions. The focus on the smooth functioning of the process, rather than rigidly adhering to a specific sequence, underscores the pragmatic and adaptable nature of effective steering in an operational context. This implies that for successful management you need to prioritise efficiency and flexibility while allowing for autonomy within the operational tasks.

In conclusion, these experiences demonstrate that flexibility of mind and adaptability are not only desirable but also constitute crucial competencies to effectively perform leadership. They enable individuals to navigate between strategies, concepts, and perspectives, both at the meta-strategic and operational level.

STRATEGIC THINKING

Strategic thinking is crucial to balance ecological goals, practicalities, and finances. A chairman of a CFC underscored the crucial role the board plays in this process, emphasising the friction between the long-term goals of ecological measures and the daily practical reality, such as limited financial resources and immediate production effects:

All nature-inclusive measures, the ecological measures you want to take. Yes, they have an impact on your production, but not necessarily in the same year. So, you really have to see them over the long-term. And that's why they sometimes end up being addressed last because daily practices may demand quicker actions or, coincidentally, funds may be depleted. For example, we can no longer create a nature-friendly bank due to a lack of funds. Nature-driven is indeed our core business. And yes, production is fantastic, but you have to ensure that these three pillars are in balance – socially connected, economically supported, and nature-driven. I think the board has an important task to ensure that they are in balance, and if it were solely up to the farmer, it would be more production-oriented.

This illustrates the importance of the board in safeguarding the balance among the three pillars of the Herenboeren concept. In this context, strategic thinking involves being able to consider various factors to gain a holistic understanding of the situation. It implies proactive and visionary thinking to achieve long-term success. Within HB NL, there is a growing trend of strategic thinking. Although the concept with the three pillars and seven principles was formulated a long time ago, they did not serve as a guiding framework until 2023. However, clear changes were observed in that year. Project proposals are now developed in alignment with the pillars and principles, as well as the annual plan for 2024. The same approach is applied to presentations during HB NL team meetings and when HB NL is held accountable to the cooperatives during formal discussions, such as the chairpersons' meeting. Some respondents connect strategic thinking to HB NL and pragmatic thinking to the CFCs. One respondent remarked: "The development of a coherent and effective overarching policy that advances the goals of the entire Herenboeren movement demands strategic decision-making and meta-level thinking". During a discussion with interim director about reconsidering the blueprint of the Herenboeren farm he responded:

I am much more inclined towards the mindset that every step in the right direction is valuable; one must be quite ambitious. Push things significantly to take many steps forward, but doing everything at once is not feasible. This also applies when you have to compromise on your concept to make something possible. In that case, a slightly less sustainable Herenboeren farm is still better than conventional agriculture. So, as long as it's a step forward, it's good. However, if you continue to cling to your ideal, and the conclusion is that you can no longer start a Herenboeren farm, you're actually worse off than if you say, 'I'm willing to compromise a bit here,' but then I'm still much more sustainable and better than what conventional agriculture does. That's when volume comes into play because then your impact is ultimately greater than achieving the ideal on just one farm.

This emphasises the importance of gradual, ambitious steps forward and acknowledges the need for pragmatism in compromises to ensure feasibility. It demonstrates strategic ability to uphold ideals while also making realistic adjustments. The emphasis on increasing impact through scaling reflects a strategic approach in achieving objectives. In addition to strategic thinking at the meta-level and from a holistic perspective, employees of HB NL display strategic thinking skills when guiding a project or addressing a specific problem. One employee shared her approach and strategy in problem-solving:

Last week, it became evident that there is a risk of PFAS contamination at a location yet to be purchased. How do I proceed? Well, first, I assess the problem. Since we encountered PFAS at a different location before, I review our previous response. Next, I identify institutions addressing this issue. RIVM, okay, and research on PFAS in eggs is being conducted at the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam. Alright, who leads this research? A professor. Can I contact him via LinkedIn? Yes, I succeeded. This establishes a connection for potential collaboration on the research. Thus, I immediately scale up from a smaller to a larger context to address the problem, preferably leveraging research funding from other parties. Additionally, I respond pragmatically, especially concerning communication with the relevant farm initially. Next, I

create a factsheet to communicate to all cooperatives, followed by a more extended process of assessing the importance of delving deeper into the issue.

This strategy not only demonstrates the ability to respond pragmatically but also indicates a tendency to work in a structured manner and addressing the problem from a small to large scale. Along with the emphasis on communication, both internally and externally, and consideration of deeper implications, reflects a holistic and strategic approach.

5.2.2.2 Relational- and Communicative skills

Management skills are an essential for success within the Herenboeren movement. However, perhaps even more crucial are relational- and communicative skills. These competencies resonate with the ethos of the movement – collaboratively producing sustainable food. Not surprisingly, all respondents emphasised that working within the Herenboeren movement is truly ‘people’s work’. A chairman of a CFC remarked: “Yes, the farm belongs to everyone; the heart of the farm must beat. It should be a welcoming place for people to visit. Of course, there should be a harvest from the land, but the social aspect is crucial because, ultimately, you need that community to actively contribute to the farm. The challenge lies in genuinely engaging your members to make them feel involved”.

INSPIRATIONAL ABILITIES

The Herenboerderij is an inspiring place. However, the ability to convey the story is also crucial to truly inspire people. Geert van der Veer is the figurehead of the movement and can inspire people like no other. Many members indicate that they joined because of Geert’s inspiring story. The narrative of the Herenboerderij and his vision for a future in which we collaboratively produce sustainable food is a key factor behind the movement’s growth. By demonstrating that things can be different, he inspires not only people outside the movement but also serves as a powerful speaker, motivating and instilling belief within the movement that we can change the system together. The importance of being able to tell the story is emphasised by many respondents. Respondent 2 noted: “Well, I believe that you should be able to effectively communicate the overall story, explaining what you stand for. Yes, you must be capable of explaining the concept in a clear and engaging manner”. Part of inspiring is also motivating—the practical aspect of inspiration, encouraging people to take action. Respondents highlighted that, particularly within the CFCs, the ability to motivate people is crucial. Simultaneously, it is acknowledged that this presents a significant challenge. A farmer remarked: “It takes much more to get people excited about hoeing than to get them excited when you are giving a pruning course. So perhaps the words you use at such a moment, and how you can motivate people, is of utmost importance. But still it seems like people find it more enjoyable to pick something up than ‘having to labour”.

‘Symbolic language’ or ‘metaphoric communication’ is observed throughout the entire movement. For instance, during a communication meeting, there were frequent references to “picking the PR pears”. During a team day of HB NL, the results of a discussion with external partners were communicated as “the harvest of the meeting”. And on New Year’s Eve, people exchanged wishes for a year of growth and fertility, inspiring one another with words such as: “Let’s sow and harvest together in the new year, both in the fields and within our communities”. This results in the establishment of a distinct shared understanding, fostering a sense of connection among people and inspiring and motivating each other. Within the movement, people often speak in the ‘we’ form. This is done to remind and reinforce people of the collective and cooperative nature of the movement. Finally, respondents emphasised the significance of the farmer. It became evident during distribution moments at the farm and from informal conversations with members that communities expect the greatest success to be achieved with a motivated and enthusiastic farmer.

ARGUMENTATION SKILLS

Based on interviews and observations, it became evident that argumentation skills, particularly in the context of substantiating choices and providing accountability or explanations, are crucial for effective

steering. An employee of HB NL, and also the chairman of a CFC, remarked: “As a chairperson, you want to be able to convey a vision like, that’s where we want to go, and you need to be able to substantiate that well. The same applies when guiding farms. Well, this is where we want to go, and this is what’s needed for it, so being able to effectively communicate that justification, I think, is also important”. Respondents also highlighted that within the movement, you encounter critical and independent-minded individuals. One interviewee explained: “All individuals who say, ‘I would like to be part of Herenboerderij’, are almost by definition independent-minded; they believe they can manage it. Otherwise, you wouldn’t be daring enough to embark on such a venture. So, it genuinely demands that you stand firm in your convictions and can effectively explain why we approach certain things in a specific manner”. This indicates that dealing with these demanding individuals requires not only courage but also the persuasive ability to convince others of the chosen approach. From the interviews and informal conversations with employees of HB NL, it appeared that during moments of social interaction with the CFCs, one must always be capable of being accountable to the communities. However, the importance of avoiding a constant accountability dynamic was also emphasised. One employee of HB NL remarked:

We also notice this, for instance, during quarterly meetings. When we suddenly face members from the organisation who can be quite critical, we need to respond quite effectively on an ad hoc basis. Essentially, being prepared for ad hoc accountability. The goal is to leave these quarterly meetings, or what could be termed ‘confrontations with members,’ with, on the one hand, maintaining the relationship and, hopefully, instilling more trust in the movement than before. It’s about giving people the feeling that they have been heard. On the other hand, we want to avoid entering into a continuous accountability dynamic with the members, where we essentially operate on a ‘your wish is our command’ basis. Because then, we end up in a scenario where the loudest voices get the most attention.

In addition to the importance of argumentation skills at the relational level from HB NL to the CFCs, argumentation skills are also observed at the CFCs. Specifically, board members and agricultural managers demonstrate a high degree of skill in argumentation. During a meeting of a community-based committee, it became clear how important it is for farmers to be able to explain and justify their actions. The agricultural manager (1st farmer) provided an account of the delivery of potatoes affected by phytophthora. The conversation shifted from discussing the causes of phytophthora to exploring possibilities for ensuring food safety: “You only see the mold infestation progressing after a few days; beforehand, I did notice that the quality was not excellent, but it remains challenging to estimate how it will develop”. A committee member responded: “Can’t we conduct an inspection before the potatoes are delivered? Cut them open or something?”. The farmer replied: “Then you would have to cut open all the potatoes; just because one crate is good doesn’t mean they are all good”. He further mentions that he finds it difficult to determine when something is of sufficient quality for delivery: “One member says we can’t deliver this, and another member says you’re not going to throw that away; it’s perfectly edible”. In addition to providing an account, he also acknowledges that he could and should have acted differently: “I also admit that I should have looked more carefully and not assumed too quickly that something would be fine”. The committee members were pleased to gain insight into the farmer’s perspective. Such transparency promoted trust and deeper comprehension among the committee members, allowing them to think more effectively about potential solutions. During participatory observations on the farm, the farmer walked back from the fields with a group of members, passing by the tunnel greenhouses and then the pigs. The group stops because all the pig came running towards them. One member asks the farmer: “Aren’t they getting any food now?”. The farmer responded: “No, I’ll give them pellets shortly because that way they’ll really eat up all the leftovers first, like the stems of the kale and such”. The member responds: “Very good, nice that you’re taking that into account”. Where the farmer’s argumentation skills foster transparency and trust among actively engaged members, it was observed the board feels accountable to the entire community. During a board meeting, a board member said: “The farmer told me that, due to the wet conditions, we have limited produce remaining in the fields and that we can only provide the members with products until the end of December. I think

we should communicate this”. Unanimous agreement was reached in seconds. There was also consensus on the need to provide an explanation for why deliveries extended until mid-February last year and now only until the end of December. Argumentation skills were also identified during the GMMs. A respondent remarked: “Most of the leadership that I see as a member is in the general member meetings. In those meetings, you can observe that the board and the chairperson take control of the session, and various committees provide reports on their activities from the past year”. During the GMMs, there was plenty of time to address members questions without exception. Responding to inquiries often required providing further explanations or clarifications. In the GMM of a newly established CFC, you could sense the inexperience in organising such meetings; this inexperience was sometimes evident in their argumentation skills. In a fully operational CFC, it was observed that spokespersons had significantly more experience in providing accountability, justifying choices, and providing explanations. This further emphasizes the significance of learning by doing.

SOCIAL SKILLS AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The continuous cultivation of social skills and emotional intelligence are instrumental in navigating the intricate web of relationships within the movement, ensuring a harmonious and supportive environment for all involved. The ability to listen was emphasised by various respondents. A member of the directive of HB NL explained that the standards are quite high to successfully perform leadership within the context of the Herenboeren: “On the one hand, you set the course, but on the other hand, you must continue to listen to assess whether you need to adjust your course based on sound arguments”. Another participant underscored the importance of active listening, empathy, and understanding diverging arguments for successful collaboration: “I think you have to be very good at listening and empathizing with what the other people say. Each person has their own motivation to participate. And, you can quickly say something that completely upsets someone, leading to a breakdown in collaboration. So, continuously listening, we really need that”. Furthermore, the importance of considering the feelings of the members, particularly in the context of their voluntary work, was emphasised. An active member expressed his feelings: “What I find very, very difficult, on the fine cultivation side, we developed compost beds, we set it up, with many volunteers. Now, there’s such a weed pressure that they destroyed the beds to use machinery and tractors again. You see it results in a more compact soil, which is not good for soil life. And who can I address about this?”. This illustrates the importance of always considering the community. Even a change in cultivation methods can have significant social implications. It also underscores the importance of a social climate where individuals take each other into account and have the opportunity to voice their concerns. Furthermore, underlines the necessity for a high level of emotional intelligence among the people actively involved, especially the farmer and board. During an interview with a farmer, the nuanced nature of social skills required in such settings was highlighted:

You have such a large group of people who ask for guidance or seek direction; you need to be able to handle that because there are individuals who come across quite bluntly, saying, ‘Yes, this is all not good.’ There are also those who don’t say anything explicitly, but you can sense that they may have opinions or thoughts. So, you need to have a sense of how to deal with certain individuals and also how to resolve some issues.

This underscores the importance of cultivating a deep understanding of how to interact with different individuals and address various concerns within the cooperative. Moreover, the role of appreciation and community building emerges in the insights shared by the respondents. A chairman explained:

I think it’s very important that people who spend a significant amount of time on the farm are acknowledged and appreciated. So, when I see that someone has created a nice video on how to store pumpkins, I send her a quick message saying, ‘Hey, that video looked great.’ Now, theoretically, according to my role, I might not need to do that, but I do know it greatly helps in showing people some appreciation, fostering community building, and making myself

easily approachable. When I go to collect my harvest, I'm certain I'll spend two hours chatting with everyone who approaches me with questions or just for a casual conversation.

This illustrates that actively engaging with community members, offering support, and expressing appreciation is used to build connections and a sense of belonging.

ANALYTICAL SKILLS

Analytical skills and strategic thinking are often used interchangeably. However, analytical thinking pertains to detailed, specific situations and problems, while strategic thinking focuses more on the overview, understanding the broader context, and developing a long-term vision. Normally, analytical skills would be categorised under 'Organisational skills'. However, in the context of this research, analytical skills have been placed under 'Relational- and Communicative skills' because it often involves connecting people, activities, and visions and translating them into concrete strategies for improvements. The interviews highlight the practical application of analytical skills in connecting people and ideas within the organisational framework. In an interview with a farmer, the ability to 'consolidate' different ideas effectively was emphasised: "The group has different ideas. You need to be able to bring them together. Afterward, you need to make an internal translation to ensure that actual steps are taken in that direction". The quote suggests the importance of being able to comprehend and distil diverse perspectives within the group, highlighting the need for clarity and coherence in understanding the various ideas presented. The importance of ensuring collaboration, finding common ground, and involving different teams, is highlighted by different respondents. As a chairman remarked:

There are different perspectives, and they should be embraced. It is the board's responsibility to bring together these diverse views. So, how do you ensure that they come together in daily practice? We can come up with ideas like, 'Let's count butterflies', okay, but what conclusions do we draw from that? Well, there are very few butterflies. Okay, then we need to do something about the herb-rich grass. We'll ask team 'sustainability' to come up with a package of measures or ensure that the farmer can and will address team 'monitoring'. I'm just giving an example, but ensuring that all these different teams collaborate effectively, find each other, and also involve the farmers – yes, that's something you need to take care of.

This suggests that it is not only important to generate ideas but also to ensure that these ideas are translated into actions through effective collaboration between different teams and actors. For effective steering and continuous improvement, the ability to connect people and direct them to available resources is underlined by an employee of HB NL:

Yeah, you see, I often try to refer people to, okay, here's a factsheet about it or rewatch this webinar, so I hope I can direct people to information that already exists. But in practice, you also see that new questions always arise for which we don't have a ready-made answer, or you have to adjust something to complete the answer. I am constantly connecting people to each other. So, I'm often the first-person people turn to, and it may well be that I refer them for that specific issue to the KAM coordinator or to someone involved in location development.

This illustrates the use of analytical skills and interpersonal skills to network and facilitate connections between individuals. Beside people and resources, it is also important to connect activities. This is illustrated by a chairman of a CFC:

What I see happening, for example, is that team 'together' organises all sorts of enjoyable activities. Now, that's fantastic, you might say. But we also noticed that most of them were centred around meeting and eating together, while we also need hands-on help in the fields. So, I think it's your role as a board member to be able to connect people and activities. How can we

come up with an activity that supports the business operations? For instance, okay, let's organise a weeding week and enjoy a bowl of soup, but we won't do yoga in the field.

This reflects a broader understanding of community needs and the ability to plan activities that serve both social and practical purposes.

REFLECTIVE ABILITY AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

During a board meeting, an evaluation of the GMM took place. Discussions revolved around what went well, but also what did not go well. In this process, the board members were also critical of their own actions. One board member remarked: "We initially sought approval for the budget, and only afterward did we communicate that this entailed a halving of the amount of meat per person per year. This, of course, is not acceptable". This emphasises the capacity to critically assess one's own actions and decisions, and to derive lessons from those reflections. In addition to reflective abilities, a high degree of self-knowledge was also observed. It became clear that most individuals, involved in leadership interactions, possess the ability to be realistic about their strengths and weaknesses. After the interim term of 6 months, the new operational director concluded that he is not suited for the role of operational director. To the whole team he communicated: "I fit well within the organisation regarding the organisational model and governance. However, I lack the experience and knowledge of the agricultural process". Admitting mistakes and acknowledging being underqualified for a task demonstrates a sense of service and prioritising the collective.

5.2.2.3 Specialised Knowledge

For leadership interactions, not only specific abilities and skills are employed, but also specialised knowledge. Based on interviews, observations, and experiences during my period of employment, it became evident that knowledge of the organisation, the field of agriculture, the Dutch agricultural sector, and the institutionalised domain is utilised in this regard.

ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The observations reveal that, during leadership interactions, most people use knowledge about the organisation's internal processes, strategies, culture, and external relationships. During interviews, it was rare for an interviewee not to reference the three pillars; in fact, they were frequently cited. The phrase 'together producing sustainable food' was also commonly mentioned. Additionally, it became evident that individuals have acquired substantial knowledge about the organisation through experience and learning by doing. As Shove et al. (2012) mentions, "elements shape each other" (p. 32) indicating that meanings, competences, and materials are interconnected. However, not only between but also within the three building blocks, everything is connected and linked. Organisational knowledge ensures that individuals are aware of the abilities and skills required within the organisation, encouraging them to actively develop and deploy these competencies. An employee of HB NL remarked: "The loose internal organisational dynamics made it clear to me that it was important to be self-reliant and develop a high degree of adaptability and stress tolerance".

AGRICULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

This knowledge is predominantly found among the farmers. Despite the limited scale of the CFCs, managing a Herenboerderij presents a significant challenge. A diversified agricultural enterprise involving arable farming, fruit cultivation, and livestock farming requires extensive agricultural knowledge. Additionally, the biodynamic and regenerative approach demands expertise in agroecology and environmental science. A farmer noted: "Providing operational guidance to the Herenboerderij requires a lot. As a farmer, you need to be able to cultivate crops, handle animals, and also engage in fruit cultivation". The communities comprise local residents, often with little to no agricultural knowledge. Committee members, boards, and chairpersons indicate that this is not necessarily a prerequisite for leadership and contributing to the farm's development. However, they emphasise the

importance of curiosity and acquiring knowledge about on-field production: “I don’t have an agricultural background, but I always listen to what the farmer says and search for background information on the internet so I can contribute”. Within HB NL, there are significant differences in the level of agricultural knowledge. The mindset was that to lead the movement, there is no need to have experts on board. As a result, most employees have limited agricultural knowledge. Farmers have expressed dissatisfaction about the guidance provided by HB NL in the agricultural domain. In response to these concerns, HB NL has decided to recruit individuals with a generalist agricultural knowledge and appoint an operational director with an agricultural background.

INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Furthermore, interviews and observations emphasise the significance of possessing knowledge about the social and political climate in which the movement operates. This is closely linked to the institutionalised framework. The Dutch agricultural policy is complex, fragmented, and often impedes the realisation and development of a *Herenboerderij*. To prevent fines, negative publicity, and facilitate development, it is crucial to be familiar with the policy. This largely involves the Common Agricultural Policy and the Environmental Act. Generally, this knowledge is available within the CFC. For specific questions about the institutional framework, the CFCs can turn to HB NL. They possess the necessary expertise. If there is uncertainty about legal aspects, they have the skills and connections to research this or advise the CFC on how and where to obtain the desired information.

5.2.3 Materials: The carriers of the practice, Tools, and Working Environments

Materials encompass various tangible elements, technologies, and physical entities involved in the performance of the practice (Shove et al., 2012).

People

A practice cannot exist without a carrier or host. In this case, these are various individuals across the organisation. This aligns with the meaning of leadership within the *Herenboeren* movement: a distributed and shared phenomenon. But who engages in the practice of leadership? Observations indicate that, at the CFCs, the practice is primarily embodied by farmers, board members, the chairman, and treasurer. Additionally, leadership was observed within community-based committees. In working groups, there appears to be less direct leadership, but this does not imply they are not involved in the practice of leadership. During an interview, a farmer remarked:

I need the members to get the work done on the land. For this, I have to keep an eye on the mood of the members. If they overwork themselves, they won’t come back. Starting with coffee sets a different tone than heading straight to the fields, as people tend to go to the land in a cheerful mood, so to speak. While just starting right away, especially around this season when it’s cold and wet, can quickly lead to a negative atmosphere. Taking a moment beforehand, so to speak, adds more cohesion to the group.

This reveals that the practice of leadership also involves the individuals who are being directed or guided. Despite the *Herenboeren* movement using less terminology of leaders and followers, in practice, certain individuals or groups guiding others were observed. It is also true that these followers have a need for this guidance. In fact, a considerable number of people, actively involved in committees and working groups express a desire for more guidance. At the same time, boards and farmers mention that they expect more guidance and direction from HB NL. Within HB NL, leadership is observed among all employees, but there is also steering by, and most importantly, the establishment of the main direction from, the directive, and the management team. Members of the cooperatives who only come to pick up their food and do not actively contribute only participate in leadership interactions sporadically, often only through their presence at and input during the GMMs.

Communication tools

Communication tools are crucial not only for information transfer and conflict management but also for facilitating processes related to direction and co-ordination. Based on both interviews and observations, it became evident that technological tools play a pivotal role in this context. Nearly all communication and collaboration between the CFCs and HB NL happen through video conferencing platforms, phone, and email. An employee of HB NL noted: “Well, alright, with a laptop and a phone, you can essentially work from any location”. Additionally, a shared Microsoft environment ensures the storage and dissemination of information and knowledge. Furthermore, a Customer Relationship Management system is utilised to assist the organisation in managing interactions and relationships. These communication tools are currently only accessible to the employees of HB NL and partially to the boards and farmers of the CFCs. Therefore, the communities are not directly linked to HB NL, and communication primarily takes place through the boards. This has resulted in a gap between the communities and HB NL, making it challenging for CFCs to connect with each other and exchange experiences and knowledge. An employee of HB NL and also chairman of a CFC explained:

I would really appreciate a shared platform, so that farms can more easily see what is happening on other farms. How does another farm approach things? Because sometimes it's just a matter of asking someone else. Right now, what we exchange is purely out of necessity, but there is still a need for community building at the national level, so to speak. There is still something needed for the connection within the entire movement. That way, people can be more easily encouraged to engage with the larger network.

Furthermore, observations indicated that both within HB NL and the CFCs, there is extensive use of information sources, such as written documents and PowerPoint presentations, during leadership interactions. Attendance at the GMMs revealed that a projector, an audio system with a microphone, and voting cards are crucial for a smooth process.

Time and Financial resources

Within the CFCs, many people have a shortage of available time, often due to a full-time job. A member of a community-based committee explained his struggle:

In meetings, I frequently have ideas about certain matters, but the other members expect me to execute them. The power or capacity for implementation, however, is something I lack due to a shortage of time. It typically relies on a specific group of people who do have the time to carry out these tasks. I consider it to be a big point of concern.

The significant time investment required for providing direction to the CFCs, coupled with the limited availability of time, is further reflected in filling the roles of chairpersons and board members. Chairpersons and board members frequently resign from their positions due to time constraints. A chairman of a CFC remarked: “I do plan to step down from my role as chairman in the coming year, if we find someone willing to succeed me. This decision is mainly because it is challenging to balance it with both work and personal life. With two young children, I find it difficult to allocate enough time to do it right”. During a board meeting, there was a discussion about starting the search for a new chairman in a timely manner. A board member pointed out that cooperative struggles to find board members because people see how much time it takes, and they find the responsibility too significant. This indicates that finding a replacement is challenging due to the significant time investment required. I have personally experienced that providing direction and guidance to the theme of monitoring requires more Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) than are currently allocated. Increasing the number of FTEs is not possible due to limited financial resources. My colleagues also express a desire to provide more direction and support to the CFCs, but they do not have enough time to address the establishment of direction in various areas. Even with overtime hours being made, farmers and employees of HB NL express concerns

about steering due to the high workload. Essentially, time is needed to practice leadership, but limited financial resources are the constraining factor.

Locations and Physical work environments

The farms are crucial for demonstrating the impact of the Herenboeren movement within the Dutch agro-food sustainability transition. At the same time, these are the places where most leadership interactions within the context of the CFCs take place. In this regard, respondents emphasised that suitable accommodation is crucial for effective steering. A member of a CFC with poor housing facilities explained: “What we need is a good place to hold meetings. Right now, we often do it on the farm itself. But when it gets colder again, we have to do it at someone’s home. Well, it would be nice if we just have a place where we can always come together. That’s also good for the community, I think”. Furthermore, a member indicated: “It’s small mechanisms like a coffee corner and a natural work environment that play an important role”.

Additionally, the first physical ‘PEER-HUB’ has now been established at ‘De Kleine Aarde’ in Boxtel. This is a safe, trust-building location not affiliated with the government or the agriculture industry. Its services as a space where farmers, citizens, entrepreneurs, researchers, and artists can come together to work on the transition of our food system. This learning, debating, cultural, and research centre brings together practice, theory, and imagination to contribute to a nature-driven, socially connected, and economically sustainable food system. At this location, the headquarters of HB NL is situated. Leadership interactions (processes of direction and co-orientation) at the highest level take place here and are stimulated by the inspiring environment of this place. A member of the directive talked about this physical PEER-HUB: “It helps attracting and forming collaborations, as well as collectively developing and implementing a vision and plan for the future. It inspires and fosters connection”.

5.3 Participants’ Perspective: Loose Organisational Dynamics

This section delves into the perceptions and experiences of network participants regarding internal organisational dynamics. It underlines the perceived effect of the flat hierarchy and team-based structure, challenging traditional leader-follower relations, and organisational values promoting an egalitarian culture and participatory decision-making. Despite the positive aspects, ambiguity and a need for self-reliance is perceived as consequence of the loose organisational structure.

A transcendence of the classic leader-follower relation was expected. Confirmation came from various respondents who indicated that the absence of clear leaders reflects the organisational model and values. To illustrate, an employee of HB NL stated: “I do not think that it can be argued that there is an absence of leadership in the movement. I do think that there is no explicitly stated and formally allocated leadership”. Next, employees of HB NL experience an egalitarian organisational culture and a high degree of participatory decision-making throughout the entire organisation. This contributes to employee satisfaction and engagement; however, an employee noted that it also has adverse effects: “At the moment, people have a strong desire for that sense of community and egalitarianism, resulting in a slightly prolonged collective focus on certain issues that probably could have been addressed more effectively in smaller committees”. Moreover, the interviews reveal that members perceive the voluntary contribution of time and resources from the organisations’ members as a key characteristic of the organisation’s model and governance structure. Besides, the democratic foundation of the organisational model and the complexity of the network is perceived to result in the involvement of a wide variety of actors. All respondents indicated that these aspects have a significant impact on the steering, guidance, and support of HB NL, as well as collaboration with the CFCs. Furthermore, most respondents stated that being part of a complex social dynamic network requires continuous adjustment of direction, strategies, goals, and approaches.

These organisational characteristics significantly influence the success of the movement. In the case of the Herenboeren movement, success is defined by procedural sustainability: “the ability to engage in processes beneficial to large-scale change”. To achieve this, HB NL aims to grow through replication, the most common diffusion pathway according to Gernert et al. (2018), and the CFCs for stable farming communities where food is produced in a nature-driven manner. Respondent 1 highlighted why HB NL has not been successful in the past year—limited growth and an insufficient service provided to the CFCs. He attributed this to the impact of the current internal organisation:

It is a quite loosely structured organisation. People enjoy working here, the intrinsic motivation to work for the Herenboeren is tremendous. I find that terrific. However, there is little coherence in how we work, you know. There is little structure, so people are, I want to say left to their own devices, everyone works quite independently. There is little coherence or steering. That is a disadvantage, especially in combination with the fact that there hasn't really been a very clear plan made for this year. So, as an employee, you don't really know what is expected of you, even though, we have the ambition to grow significantly. Thus, the organisation, and the teams within the organisation, need a bit more structure and direction regarding where we are heading as an organisation. Because this month it can be one thing, and next month it can be something else entirely, and that makes it challenging to work.

Thus, the loose organisational structure and the absence of a clear annual plan, as well as concrete vision and goals for the year, is perceived to result in ambiguity about responsibilities. Respondents additionally emphasised that this demands a significant degree of self-reliance from employees and members.

5.4 Leadership Unveiled: Exploring Immediate Impact

In this section the direct impact of the observed practice of leadership is explored by explaining the negative effects on organisational direction, coordination, and decision-making, the positive effects including inclusivity, innovation, collaboration, and individual growth. The contribution to agency is then discussed, concluding that leadership not only generates agency but also embodies a form of agency. This arises from the leadership-related context, providing room for participants' engagement in leadership interactions. The introduction of a positional leader, enhancing internal organisational dynamics, underscores the recursive relationship between structure and agency.

5.4.1 Challenges: Organisational Direction, Coordination, and Decision-making

The most profound negative effect of the current way leadership is practiced is the limited establishment of a collective direction—defining a clear and coherent path for the organisation. Without the establishment of a clear direction employees of HB NL are left to self-direction, which, while in line with the philosophy of the movement, is hindered by the lack of consistent working methods and a clear path. As a result, employees of HB NL and teams sometimes struggle to identify what they should be working on and, more importantly, what they should not be working on. In the CFCs, the responsibility for determining the course primarily rests with the board. However, the board acknowledges that they are also volunteers and may not be able to establish direction on all fronts. Hence, both the board and the farmers express a need for more guidance and support from HB NL in setting a vision and strategic direction to guide decision-making and actions. The fact that leadership is dispersed among multiple individuals and groups of people, rather than being concentrated in a traditional hierarchical structure can be effective. A well-organised internal structure with structured working methods, clear agreements, and proper communication tools is a crucial prerequisite. Because these elements are currently absent or insufficient, the observed practice of leadership results in significant coordination challenges. Moreover, leadership is observed to be practiced by different individuals within self-defined domains. However, most domains do not exist in isolation; they are part of larger processes where domains

coincide and overlap. Because most people tend to think in terms of projects rather than processes, lack awareness of who is responsible for which domain, and often do not have much knowledge about what the domains entail, inefficiencies arise in certain situations. To illustrate, questions from the CFCs often reach the wrong individuals. These questions are then forwarded, left unattended, or managed by individuals who should not be involved. Additionally, individuals may not know how to manage certain issues, leading to the upward delegation of problems to directives, causing delays. The new operational director of HB NL remarked: “You also see that decisions are delegated upwards. You know, I get a question, and I think, I can answer that question, but why is that question coming to me? Why can’t you decide for yourself? And often, it’s because people say, well, I don’t exactly know what my mandate is or what the priority is”. In this regard, he mentioned: “As you grow larger, more people need to make decisions within an agreement, within a plan, and a framework. What you agree upon with each other. Otherwise, you, as a directive, become the bottleneck in the growth of your organisation”. It also sometimes results in prolonged collective pondering over issues. Decisions are then made late or only partially. An example is the renaming of the movement. From various perspectives, both internal and external, concerns have been voiced about the dissatisfaction with the name ‘Herenboeren’. In the past, a ‘Herenboer’ referred to a farmer who had enough capital not to work the land themselves but to employ staff for this purpose (ANW, n.d.). Hence the name gives people the impression of something elitist, hierarchical, and unequal. Farmers also indicated that the name ‘Herenboeren Nederland’ suggests a hierarchy where HB NL holds the reins. As a result, different individuals within HB NL have started exploring the possibilities of a name change and weighing the pros and cons. This was communicated to the CFCs by HB NL, but a year later, the discussions are still ongoing, and it has ultimately been decided not to change the name at this time. The result is that many people have been involved in this issue without tangible results. With such matters, you need to make a concrete and quick decision, communicate it, and most important not revisit it. The above-mentioned indicates that the current leadership practices lead to inefficiencies. Directing and co-orienting issues become time-consuming and do not achieve the quality that could have been delivered by someone else within the organisation. The diffused and not formalised nature of leadership for different domains results in unclear accountability and ambiguity about responsibilities. A member of a CFC mentions that he is not entirely sure who is responsible for what, leading to reluctance in addressing people. Furthermore, this situation causes individuals not to feel accountable for specific matters, and simultaneously, finger-pointing emerges. The CFCs express dissatisfaction about the performance of HB NL; this is partly due to uncertainty surrounding the collaborative relationship and the delineation of tasks and responsibilities.

5.4.2 Fostering Inclusivity, Innovation, Collaboration, and Individual Growth

The current practice of leadership creates an environment where diverse voices and perspectives are valued and integrated into decision-making and problem-solving processes—there is a high degree of inclusivity. This encourages diverse perspectives and ideas, resulting in a high level of innovation and creativity, thereby improving the responsiveness to change—an organisation’s ability to adapt and evolve in the face of evolving external and internal conditions. The control of the Colorado beetle on a CFC is a prime example of innovation resulting from inclusivity. A member built a beetle beater with electric propulsion. Surprisingly, it worked remarkably well: in the initial trial, the beater knocked dozens of beetles off a row of plants. To vacuum the beetles from the collection bin, a handheld vacuum cleaner was used. A member was curious to see if it could serve the same function as the beater, and it turned out that using it directly on the plants worked fantastically, easily sucking dozens of beetles of a row. The entire potato field could now be traversed in two hours. Consequently, there are no longer 4-6 people spending an entire day removing the beetles by hand and crawling on their knees. Furthermore, the observed practice of leadership fosters a culture of teamwork, mutual support, and stimulates collaborative problem-solving. Since everyone within HB NL and most active individuals within the CFCs are engaged in processes of direction and co-orientation (leadership interactions), and each person

possesses unique qualities and expertise, these can be combined to facilitate the resolution of problems. Thus, the practice of leadership results in numerous actors and different people working together to identify, analyse, and solve complex issues and challenges. To illustrate, a member from a CFC, who had a background in communication, recruitment, and selection, he developed a recruitment plan, which was then executed by a dedicated working group established for this purpose. The collaboration between these individuals was essential. Neither party could have resolved it individually, as both provide direction in different areas (strategic and executive). Additionally, individuals at various levels have the opportunity to develop leadership skills, contributing to their professional growth. During the interviews, it also became evident that various individuals have acquired valuable insights into effectiveness leadership strategies and approaches. The current form of leadership, therefore, results in learning and adaptation—the processes of acquiring new knowledge, skills, and insights, and utilising them to adjust strategies and actions in response to changing circumstances and lessons learned from experience. A farmer mentioned that he learned most from own experience. To illustrate, he provided an example about learning how to direct members in the field. He explained:

It's a completely different type to work with, because I get paid for this, so if something is asked of me, I sometimes have to work really hard to get it done. Whereas when I ask a member for something, I have to be very mindful of their voluntary commitment. I made a mistake once by starting to make coffee too late. I definitely felt the consequences that day. I said, yes, let's finish this first. Eventually we were at the coffee table 1.5 hours later. Everyone was completely exhausted. Now I know that if I schedule a coffee break earlier, I can often still have them working for another 2 hours after the break.

And lastly, people are more engaged when they have opportunities to contribute to decision-making and leadership processes. This fosters a sense of shared ownership and commitment, while simultaneously cultivating a sense of responsibility.

5.4.3 Exploring the Dynamic Interplay of Leadership, Agency, and Structure

Now the question arises: *How does the observed practice of leadership influence the generation of agency?* As mentioned, agency refers to an individual's capacity for action (Hitlin & Elder, 2006). The actors capacity reflects the capabilities and the opportunities and constraints of the complex social web in which the actor is embedded (Pesch, 2015). It can be asserted that the current practice of leadership does not generate agency but, in fact, represent a form of agency itself. The opportunity for everyone to be involved in leadership interactions, thereby having the ability to exert influence in achieving organisational objectives, results form the leadership-related context, in which the internal organisation dynamics and actor engagement are the primary factors effecting the practice. Figure 6 presents the revised conceptual model.

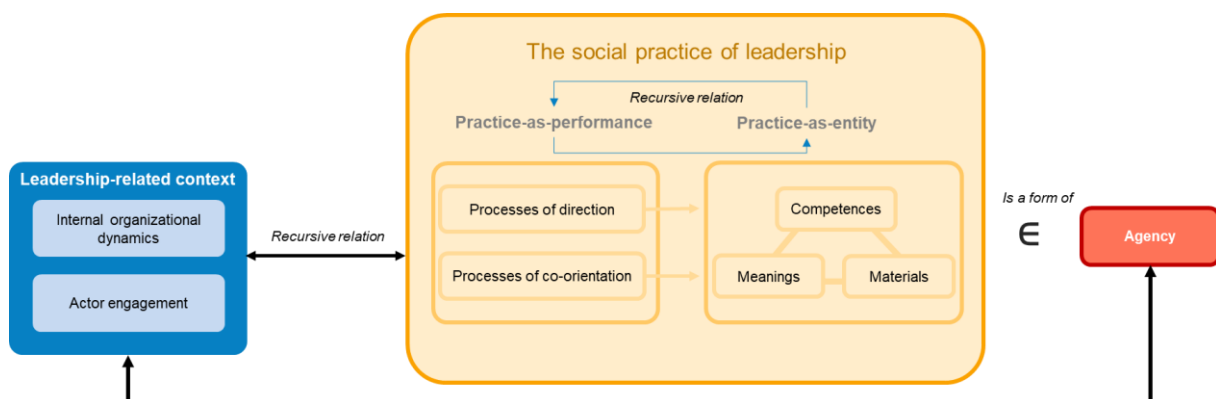


FIGURE 6 REVISED CONCEPTUAL MODEL

To substantiate the revised conceptual model, it is crucial to elaborate on the relationship between leadership, agency, and structure. Both within HB NL and the CFC, individuals are given too much space and too few tools to contribute to achieving the objectives. Excessive freedom is a limitation for agency because agents, groups, or individuals rely on structures to perform social actions (Uhl-Bien, 2006). To ensure that the observed practice of leadership becomes more effective and makes an optimal contribution to achieving the organisation's objectives, attention should be directed towards the structural side; the leadership-related context.

The appointment of an internal director for HB NL suggests that the organisation sees positional leaders as a means to facilitate the desired improvements to the internal organisation dynamics and governance structure. The aim is to create the right environment in which the current practice of leadership can better flourish. Looking at the impact of this positional leader, some notable observations were made. Under his leadership significant improvements seem to have occurred in the internal organisation: prioritising, introducing process ownership, developing clear objectives, a vision, and a plan for the next year, more clarity about tasks and responsibilities, and improving efficiency in collaboration and communication by appointing a Management Team (representing members from all teams). Furthermore, the new internal director, together with a governance committee, has proposed a new governance model aiming to give CFCs more influence in steering the movement, thus increasing their agency. This indicates that the leadership, practiced by a positional leader, changed structural aspects, thereby better empowering the observed practice of leadership to become more effective. This illustrates the recursive relationship between structure and agency.

6. Discussion: A Thoughtful Conversation

This study attempts to find an answer to the following question: *How does the social practice of leadership facilitate network participants to achieve their objectives?* Addressing the main question begins with an overview of the main findings and answering the sub-questions.

The findings illustrate that leadership within the examined AFN is a distributed and shared phenomenon. Although this approach is considered essential, by contemporary leadership studies, to meet the needs of modern organisations, this research reveals that such a leadership approach does not automatically guarantee success. When the internal organisational dynamics are too loose, a distributed and shared leadership approach results in challenges related to coordination, work efficiency, and a limited establishment of a general direction. The findings also show that individuals engaged in leadership activities play an active role in shaping organisational structures, emphasising the recursive relationship between agency and structure.

(1) *How does the social practice of leadership take place in the alternative food network?* Leadership within the Herenboeren movement is characterised by its distributed and shared nature, emphasising collective engagement and adaptability to the dynamic landscape and internal context of the movement. It is associated with ethical guidance, servanthood, and equality, portraying a selfless practice committed to inclusivity and collaborative problem-solving. Additionally, leadership encompasses being a role model and involves self-steering, emphasising autonomy and individual action. The competences used during leadership interactions include organisational skills, relational- and communicative skills, along with organisational-, agricultural-, and institutional knowledge. The individuals embodying the practice range from members of the executive committee of HB NL to members of community-based working groups. Furthermore, communication tools as well as the physical locations and material aspects of the work environment are utilised during the performance of leadership. The conjunction of these elements is drawn upon as a set of resources when performing the practice, thus influencing the quality and dynamics of leadership interactions within the movement.

(2) *How do participants regard the role of leadership in relation to the governance and internal organisation of the network?* The network participants experience that the flat hierarchy, coupled with the internal organisation dynamics, leads to a transcendence of the classic leader-follower relationship. Additionally, within HB NL, an egalitarian organisational culture results in feelings of participatory and collective decision-making. The interviews reveal that members consider the voluntary contribution to achieve a particular shared cause as the foundation of the organisation's model and governance structure. Moreover, respondents emphasised the intricate nature of the network, leading to a diverse array of individuals engaging in leadership interactions. They also state that being part of a complex, socially dynamic network necessitates continuous adjustment of direction, strategies, goals, and approaches. Finally, while not directly tied to leadership, respondents clarify that the loose organisational structure, coupled with the absence of a clear annual plan, concrete vision, and goals for the year, leads to ambiguity about responsibilities and demands a significant degree of self-reliance from network participants.

(3) *What is the direct impact of the observed practice of leadership on agency?* The current leadership practice has negative effects, most importantly the limited establishment of a collective direction. The dispersed nature of leadership, and the lack of a well-organised internal structure, also poses substantial coordination challenges. This setup leads to prolonged pondering, work inefficiencies, and delayed or partial decisions. Lastly, it results in unclear accountability, causing dissatisfaction and finger-pointing. On the positive side, it creates an inclusive environment where diverse voices are valued, fostering innovation and creativity. It encourages teamwork and mutual support, leading to effective problem-solving. The adopted approach also provides opportunities for individuals at various levels to develop leadership skills, contributing to personal growth. Lastly, engagement is heightened when individuals

have the chance to contribute to decision-making and leadership processes, fostering a sense of shared ownership and responsibility.

Although these effects are closely related to agency, this requires further elaboration, which leads to the central conclusion of this research. Leadership is a form of agency itself, shaped by structures—providing everyone with the opportunity to be involved in leadership interactions and thereby having the ability to exert influence results from the wider structures. Therefore, the observed social practice of leadership is not the catalyst facilitating network participants to achieve their objectives. Instead, it is the structures, comprising the leadership-related context, which act as the driving force. Based on the insights obtained during interviews and observations regarding the current leadership-related context, it becomes evident that internal organisational dynamics is the most prominent factor hindering network participants from contributing to goal attainment. This is due to the fact that, within both HB NL and the CFC, individuals are given too much space and too few tools—excessive freedom becomes a limitation as groups, teams, committees, individuals rely on structures to execute social actions.

Having addressed this, it is now time to reflect on the premises formulated at the outset of the research. Drawing from expectations derived through the literature review, it was anticipated that leadership is a process that emerges during moments of social interaction, involving a diverse range of individuals in its practice. The results confirm this expectation; leadership interactions were consistently observed throughout the observations, ranging from board meetings and executive discussions to working group activities on the fields in the absence of the farmer. Moreover, the initial expectation that significant differences would exist between leadership the context of HB NL and that of CFCs. Nevertheless, the findings revealed substantial similarities in the practice of leadership within both contexts. As a result, leadership-as-entirety could be formulated for the entire movement. The premise that the social practice of leadership contributes to generating agency does not hold true, as it was concluded that leadership itself is a form of agency. With this observation, alignment is made with the later work of Joseph Raelin. After Raelin suggested to go from leadership-as-practice to leaderful practices (2011) he went one step further reframing leadership as collaborative agency (2016). Additionally, literature from the new paradigm of leadership suggests that strong propositional and hierarchical leaders are not needed or even counterwork the development of modern organisations that are part of complex, socially dynamic networks. Nonetheless, this research illustrates that in situations where internal organisational dynamics lack cohesion and structure, individuals holding formal power and decision-making mandates at higher levels can play a pivotal role. This aligns with the findings of Grabs et al. (2016) and Onyx & Leonard (2011), which indicate that the abilities of individual leaders contribute to the success of GRIs.

For future research, there are important considerations: the scope of the case and the complexity of the network result in a broad range of ‘leadership-related contexts’. Although substantial similarities were observed between HB NL and the CFCs differences exist in the way leadership interactions take place. By focusing on the entire movement, attention could only be given to the overarching meanings, materials, and competences. This provides a comprehensive understanding of how leadership is practiced globally. However, only having a ‘generalistic’ view of the practice of leadership makes the formulation of concrete and practical recommendations for the movement challenging. Moreover, the limited research period made it difficult to observe changes in the practice of leadership over time—the making and breaking of links are essential components of SPT that could not be adequately addressed. This is unfortunate, especially in the context of the Herenboeren, as the interviews clearly indicate that leadership in the movement is a dynamic phenomenon undergoing rapid changes. Hence, for future research, it is recommended to narrow down the object of inquiry and define it more precisely. When utilising SPT, extending the research period to 2 – 4 years is advised to better comprehend changes in the practice of leadership. For instance, one might consider investigating the practice of leadership by the board of a CFC during the startup phase of the farm (first 2 years).

Despite SPT enables a shift away from the notion that leadership is an attribute of the individual and providing valuable insights into the relational realities, the primary emphasis lies on the practice itself, with less attention given to the impacts or effects of that practice. Consequently, the statements of the specific contributions of leadership are not theoretically grounded. To gain a better understanding of why, how, where, and by whom change occurs, other subjects of inquiry and theoretical frameworks are expected to be more beneficial. In this context, conceptualizations of power, that explicitly relate to structural change, seem well-suited. Notably, the conceptual framework developed by Avelino & Rotmans (2009) for analysing power in transitions should be acknowledged. Moreover, assemblage theory seems fit to serve as a robust theoretical foundation.

The study's primary contribution lies in the insights it offers to the movement concerning the relationship between leadership, agency and structures. To bolster agency and, consequently, enhance the effectiveness of the current leadership practice, there is a need for further crystallisation of the internal organisation, and adjustments to the existing governance model. The responsibility for developing and implementing a structure that stimulates effective direction and co-orientation primarily lies with HB NL. Beyond its practical implications, the research also holds scientific significance. The exploration of SPT in the context of Herenboeren exposed its limited explanatory power, as it falls short in offering in-depth explanations for complex social phenomena. While SPTs consider practice as the mentally embodied aspects of activities where agency and structure interact, which is accurate, the emphasis on agency tends to result in a relative neglect of structures. This raises questions about the extent to which the theory has succeeded to help researchers to move beyond dualism. Finally, the research has social implications. The thick descriptions in different areas provide insight into the relational realities, which can make a significant contribution to raising awareness and understanding of specific issues within the organisation. It can serve as the basis for discussion and dialogue, for instance, regarding the finger-pointing among and within different groups within the network, such as between members and boards, and boards/farmers and HB NL.

Within the field of AFNs, delving deeper into leadership dynamics offers a compelling avenue for further exploration. The first recommendation is exploring leadership in different AFNs, encompassing CSA, CFC, urban farming initiatives, and self-harvest gardens. This can shed light on the unique attributes that shape these practices in different contexts. A second suggestion is to conduct a detailed, long-term study focused on changes in leadership practices within a specific AFN. By linking these changes to shifts in organisational objectives, network expansion, and the participants' ability to take action, a deep understanding of the enduring consequences of leadership within AFNs can be obtained. A third proposal is a qualitative study that focuses on the obstacles related to direction and co-orientation within a designated AFN. Such research could help the development of practical strategies to improve leadership effectiveness and enhance operational efficiency. The last recommendations are related to a new issue that has emerged from the research: the definition and implementation of formal leadership within HB NL. As Greiner (1998) remarks: "finding that manager is easier said than done" (p. 6). Hence, doing inquiry about the appointment process for formal leaders within the dynamic landscape of AFNs provide interesting opportunities for future research. For instance, a detailed exploration of the process by which formal leaders are appointed, with a specific focus on the factors that influence and shape the process. These proposed research pathways go beyond simple exploration; together they promise deep insights into the complex dynamics of leadership within various AFNs and provide practical implications that have the potential to refine and advance leadership practices in the evolving landscape of AFNs.

To enhance the success and sustainability of the Herenboeren movement, recommendations have been formulated with the aim of facilitating more targeted interventions. As an employee of HB NL, I possess the capacity for the direct application of research insights, leading me to concentrate my

recommendations on HB NL. This approach is particularly beneficial given the pivotal role of HB NL in advancing the Dutch agro-food sustainability transition through supporting the development and realisation of 350 Herenboerderijen, where nature-driven, socially connected, and economically sustainable food production takes place. The first recommendation is to enhance the physical presence of HB NL at the CFCs to improve the relationships and customise services according to the needs of the CFCs. Concurrently, it is imperative to uphold a focus on the essential areas of service provision. To amplify efficacy and active member engagement, develop more tools for cooperatives in areas on which the members are motivated to contribute (e.g. biodiversity, soil, design of animal enclosures, monitoring, social activities). Additionally, it is advisable to refine the internal organisation of HB NL, placing a specific emphasis on improving internal communication and fostering collaboration between the teams of HB NL. Simultaneously, ensuring clarity regarding responsibilities and tasks is pivotal to boost work efficiency and avert delays resulting from delegated issues. Foster transparency so that questions from cooperatives find the appropriate channels, thereby instilling greater confidence in HB NL among the CFCs. Furthermore, a well-defined establishment of a general direction is necessary, and it should be articulated and communicated concretely. Maintaining consistency in decision-making is crucial; continual revisions and adjustments have an adverse impact on motivation and allocation of resources. This principle extends to the appointment of positional leaders as well. To summarise, refrain from impulsive decisions, thoroughly deliberate on matters before reaching decision making. Simultaneously, recognise that, at the CFCs level, there is a heightened demand for pragmatic support in addressing concrete issues; striking a balance between strategic planning and operational efficacy is recommended. All these recommendations reflect making adjustments to the leadership-related context, structural elements aiming to increase agency and enhance the effectiveness of the observed social practice of leadership.

7. Conclusion: Making Strong Sustainable Futures Imaginable

For stronger AFNs, reduced distance between producers and consumers, and new forms of (market) governance—encompassing systems such as CFCs, CSA, and self-harvest gardens—considering the interplay between leadership and organisational structures can be achieved by different means. Cultivating adaptive organisational structures to accommodate changes in leadership roles, respond to emerging challenges, and capitalise on opportunities for growth and innovation. For the Herenboeren movement, the current organisational structures, built on democratic values and an egalitarian organisational culture, resulted in prolonged collective pondering about a new governance model. An organisational structure capable of providing the flexibility to make swift decisions when required, could have prevented the delay of the implementation of a new governance model. This, in turn, would have supported the organisation's development and growth, as a more suitable governance model could have been promptly implemented upon recognizing the inadequacy of the current model. Moreover, providing leadership training and development programs can empower individuals within the Herenboeren movement to take on leadership roles more effectively. This not only enhances leadership skills within the organisation but also contributes to the overall robustness of the network. Within the farmer training program, emphasis could be placed on effectively managing diverse groups on the farm. Additionally, open-webinars can be organised about strategies to enhance the motivation of members to take action. Moreover, implementing regular feedback mechanisms ensures a continual dialogue among farmers, the board, and HB NL on one side, and community members on the other—facilitates a better understanding of the evolving needs of the community, enabling adjustments in leadership approaches and organisational structures as necessary. The initial steps might involve establishing an 'engagement committees', who conduct standardised member satisfaction surveys and host discussion evenings where members can collaborate on aspirations, challenges, and future strategies. Collectively, these

initiatives can foster improved relationships among stakeholders, more effective guidance and adaptation, and a continuous enhancement of operations on the farms.

As a critical agrarian researcher, I would like to conclude by suggesting that challenges faced by AFNs should be approached from a positive perspective. The unique attributes of AFNs creates protective spaces for innovation, learning and experimentation, fostering continuous improvement and heightened responsiveness to change—from cultivating the land and building communities with strong relationships to shaping leadership practices and organisational structures. With the most valuable lessons often arising from mistakes, critical agrarian researcher should always value and support such cultures, recognizing ‘learning by doing’ as integral to the functioning of AFNs—embracing the strength of their alternativeness and working from and for the margins is a prerequisite for any researcher aspiring to combine research and activism.

“The biggest contribution of AFNs lies in creating spaces where new skills and knowledge are co-developed—different values and forms of learning and living together make strong sustainable futures imaginable”

(Pascal Pelders, 2024)

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9. Appendices

Appendix 1 Code Framework

Group	Category	Umbrellacode	Description
Leadership-related context	Internal organisation dynamics	Governance structure	The organization operates on a democratic model, relying heavily on volunteers. The loose internal-organisation structure offers flexibility for ideas and innovation but also an egalitarian sense of community and ambiguity about responsibilities. To improve, a reorganization of the governance structure takes place.
		Division of labour	HBNL supports the CFC in implementing their concept, the farmer is delegated to the CFC. The tasks and responsibilities are clear for the farmer and the board. However, for working groups and committees, tasks are less clear. Task allocation for these groups depends on factors like available time and motivation. Recent changes in HB NL involve implementing process ownership to clarify tasks and responsibilities between teams and employees. Within teams of HB NL the division of labour is clear adjustments are based on available time and expertise within the teams.
		Decision-making processes	Decision-making within HB NL at the team level, practical decisions are swiftly reached through collaborative efforts. The absence of a formal decision-making procedure and ambiguity about responsibilities often leads to issues being delegated upward, causing delays. The recent introduction of the Management Team (MT) and a new informal decision-making strategy aims to streamline this process. In the CFC, decision-making occurs at different levels. The General Assembly (ALV) serves as the highest decision-making body, voting on significant proposals from the board. Throughout the year, the farmer and the board make decisions, with the community having less involvement in day-to-day matters to avoid delays. Decision-making within working groups and committees mostly focusing on pragmatic issues like scheduling meetings or organizing events.
		Allocation of resources	Within the CFCs, resource scarcity is a key concern, prompting a focus on budgeting and having the right amount of members (200) and mouths(500). The approach is primarily financial, but there's recognition that community resources are underutilized. The labour shortage on farms poses a significant challenge. Cooperatives contribute annually to HB NL, but there's a perception of a lack of visible returns. For HB NL, annual contributions from CFCs fall short of service needs, resulting in loans and the need for donations. Financial scarcity is expected until a larger number of farms are established by 2023. No clear plan for 2023 and less CFCs were established than expected HB NL resulted in financial problems. For 2024 the directive developed a concrete plan and budget for 2024. The result is prioritization in specific areas accompanied with the firing some employees.
		Working atmosphere	The work culture varies significantly across locations. In general, actively engaged members describe a friendly working environment where care is taken for the land and for each other. The farmer and the board play a significant role in fostering this atmosphere. Also within HB NL taking care for each other and for the land is being emphasized, a symbolic chair is always reserved for Mother Earth during meetings. An 'egalitarian' atmosphere prevails, with a culture assuming broad involvement in decision-making. However, this also results in emotional and mental problems when people are excluded.
	Wider social settings	Societal norms and values	From an economy of takers to an economy of caretakers. The norms and values within the movement are at odds with those of contemporary society. However, societal norms and values remain visible within the CFC. Despite many members supporting the concept and desiring to consume sustainable locally produced food, it is often observed that a majority of members still behave as consumers; they merely pick up their food without actively contributing to the development of the farm.
		Cultural influence	The cultural influence of the conventional agricultural sector is palpable for HB NL. With the current nitrogen crisis and the rise of the BBB party, it is clear that the number of parties to collaborate with, especially investors, is decreasing due to strong opposition from the conventional sector. The Herenboeren movement is adversely affected because they do not take sides but are still labeled by others. CFCs located in conventional agricultural landscapes struggle to integrate into the local agricultural community. Additionally, it is observed that on many farms, different cultures emerge, often related to spirituality, Buddhism, etc.
		Economic conditions	When there is an economic depression or dip, it becomes more challenging to start a CFC because members need to invest a significant amount of capital. As a result, the income for HB NL also decreases while the costs of the services continue to rise. Also realization of a CFC occurs more quickly in urban areas due to the presence of more wealthy, affluent, conscious, and educated individuals (in suburban areas). However, acquiring land in these areas proves to be difficult.
	Actor engagement	Policies and regulations	HB NL plays a crucial role in the development and realization phase of a CFC, focusing on obtaining permits, adjusting zoning plans, and submitting applications. The process often involves negotiations with local officials, tenants, and other parties, leading to challenges for initiative groups, some of which may halt due to legislation. The obstacles are not only related to land acquisition but also include restrictions on activities like spreading manure or keeping livestock. Examples include challenges with a Flemish barn in WP, manure in Rotterdam, and livestock in Weert and Soerendonck.
		Involvement of key actors	The farmer plays a pivotal role in various farm processes, serving as a central figure at the farm level. The members form the heart of the CFCs. All other actors or groups consist of members of the community. The most formal and important actors are the chairman, board and treasurer. Next there are Committees and working groups often initiated by members. The challenge faced by CFCs is that there is only consistent and active involvement of a small group of members. Herenboeren Nederland (HB NL) operates with a directive of three directors, a management team, and teams with multiple members. Further there is involvement of external actors, such as green coalitions (Caring Farmers, Groenboerenplan), likeminded initiatives (GRI, AFNs), research and educational institutions, and (agricultural) advisers. Notably, there is minimal involvement of governmental institutions and the financial sector.
		Nature and frequency of interactions	At the CFCs social interaction occur primarily within the individual team, committee, or working group, with consistent contact with the farmer. Continuous social interaction occurs between board members and farmers. Respondents stress the importance of visibility and accessibility of the farmer and board for community development. Within HB NL, interactions also occur primarily inter-team, but with the establishment of the MT, there is increased (indirect) interaction between teams. Physical interactions, such as team days, have decreased over time. Contact with CFCs goes through boards and follows a formal online meeting structure. Face-to-face contact with CFCs is limited and often only with farmers, the chairman and some specific members that have taken responsibility for a specific task such as KAM-coordinator. Such physical interactions are only happening once or twice a year.
		Collaboration and common goals	Collaboration within the CFC faces challenges due to varying intrinsic motivations, time constraints, and a prevalent tendency for isolated work. Improving transparency and understanding through enhanced communication tools and fostering connections, such as discussion evenings, can significantly enhance collaboration between the board, committees, and working groups. There's a growing trend of cooperation between CFCs, exemplified by joint machinery procurement. Respondents stress the need for improved collaboration among teams within HB NL, highlighting a current lack of awareness about each other's activities. While the movement shares a common vision of contributing to the food transition, differences emerge at the detailed level between HB NL and individual cooperatives. HB NL envisions growth in the movement, while individual CFCs prioritize stability and the development of their own cooperatives.
	Spatial temporal aspects	Physical locations	HB NL has workspaces in Driebergen-Zeist, at two Herenboerderijen, and recently at 'Plaats' De Kleine Aarde. De Kleine Aarde is also the location where HB NL has been formally established since 2024. The most important physical locations are the farms. This is where the envisioned change occurs. There are significant physical differences between the locations; especially, the impact of the housing is crucial. The presence of housing has a significant impact on the functioning of the community. Communities with proper housing facilities often have more active members and develop more easily into a socially connected community.
		Timeframes and temporal trends	There is a significant difference between the "first 10 farms" and the subsequent 8 within the Herenboeren movement. The first 10 farms emerged during a period of limited experience, requiring a genuine learning process from mistakes. Additionally, these cooperatives exhibit some scepticism towards HB NL due to lower-quality service and support at the time they were in development. Differences are also observed between in terms of farmers (older, conventional), community (less involved), and approach (farmer has more control). Moreover, the timeframe for changes is very brief; problem-solving often needs to happen rapidly on the farms. The movement's rapid growth and evolving CFC preferences lead to continuous adaptation. However, CFCs criticize that the adjustment and the speed at which HB NL intervenes are insufficient. Farmers, for instance, believe that HB NL should have taken action long ago to address the issues in the orchards.

Leadership interactions	Direction	Dynamic agreement on goals	The continuous evaluation and adjustment of goals and priorities only began in response to stakeholder dissatisfaction, triggered by the farmers' 10-point plan in early 2023. HB NL responded with an ongoing process involving prioritizing services and undertaking projects like the Concept Revision Project, reflecting the organization's adaptability. The GMM, as the highest decision-making body, plays a crucial role in the dynamic agreement of goals at the farm level. Challenges lie in balancing survival and stability with the development of long-term plans and strategies for continuous growth. Currently, CFCs are more focused on immediate concerns, and discussions about long-term goals often reference input-0 without detailed concretization.
		Establishment of direction	In the CFCs, the responsibility for determining the course primarily lies with the board. While chairpersons and board members talk about shaping the direction of the farm, it appears that committees often struggle with executing tasks, even though they are defined by the board. The board, however, indicates that they are also just volunteers and are not able to establish direction on all fronts. There is a need for concrete short-term objectives and a better implementation of vision and policies. Both the board and the farmer desire more guidance and support from HB NL to effectively realize the desired direction. HB NL's guidance needs to occur at both a pragmatic hands-on and a strategic level. Previously, there was limited guidance within HB NL. There was no clear yearly plan and no concrete objectives for 2023. Employee self-direction, while in line with HB NL's desire, was hindered by the lack of a consistent working method and a clear path. Recently, HB NL seems to be implementing more guidance through a yearly plan, the establishment of an MT and Director's meetings, and clear process owners. The three pillars and seven principles now serve as a framework for determining the direction.
		Reflecting organisational values	The Herenboeren movement's clear concept, encapsulated in three pillars with seven principles, provides a framework for aligning the organization's actions, decisions, and culture with established values. However, the specific details of these principles are not yet fully communicated from HB NL to the CFC, leading to occasional confusion among members. For instance, a farmer at Goedentijd initially believed SKAL certification was obligatory for procurement, highlighting the need for clearer dissemination of information. Despite these challenges, efforts are being made to implement more concrete plans, including the establishment of seven principles and the use of the three pillars as a framework for direction-setting.
		Responsiveness to change	The responsiveness to change of the CFCs is evident in their ability to adapt to both external and internal shifts. Examples include adjustments in the poultry in response to annual avian influenza outbreaks and adapting cultivation plans due to climatic variations and pests. As a relatively young and rapidly growing movement, the Herenboeren organization, represented by HB NL, remains flexible, continually undergoing changes in roles, governance, and objectives. This adaptability is essential for navigating challenges such as shifts in land availability, financial resources, and legislative frameworks. HB NL actively engages with educational institutions and participates in the political sphere to stay resilient and responsive to ongoing changes.
	Co-orientation	Understanding diverging arguments	HB NL values and tries to understand diverse viewpoints and arguments. Despite it took some time before the CFCs were feeling heard, primarily due to the distance between the CFC and HB NL. Additionally, it is crucial to be resolute and provide solid reasoning for perspectives and positions in a movement with a loose internal organizational structure. With 500 members in the CFC, diversity of opinions is natural, but room for expressing concerns and wishes remains a challenge. Members explain that e.g. GMM is not the place to ventilate your opinion.
		Interpretations and decisions	How information is processed, analyzed, and used to make decisions involves the cognitive processes and reasoning that guide an organization's decision-making. Decision-making on the Herenboerderijen and within HB NL is based on group consensus (within the board, team, etc.). However, during the GMM, decisions are made based on a majority vote. Reasoning is often based on experience and intuition, or on advice and knowledge from HB NL. The three dimensions and seven principles constitute an informal but uniform framework for decision-making. Furthermore, some employees employ the PDCA cycle as a methodology to structure their work processes. Additionally, there has been an increasing use of business strategies such as SWOT analyses recently.
		Inclusivity	Remarkably, HB NL used to frequently think on behalf of the CFC and provided solutions to their needs. In response to criticism from the CFCs, we now observe a trend towards greater inclusivity: all relevant parties are represented in the governance committee. The introduction of a new governance model aims to ensure that the CFCs have a more direct influence on the movement. This is facilitated through an association in which the CFC collectively participates. Within HB NL, we see active promotion of diversity in team composition to embrace various perspectives. In the CFCs, the General Members Meeting (GMM) is the forum where members can voice their opinions. However, outside the GMM, members find it challenging to express themselves; they perceive a sense of alienation towards the cooperative when expressing criticism. This indicates a lack of a social climate and reporting procedures/mechanisms.
		Collaborative problem solving	Within the CFCs, there is intensive collaboration to creatively solve complex problems, often driven by limited financial resources. For instance, during winter, the cattle from one CFC are moved to the manure barn of another CFC that does not have cattle. In return, the CFC providing the space receives a portion of the solid manure. HB NL has much to learn from the CFCs regarding collaboration in addressing specific issues. However, HB NL has demonstrated proficiency in collaboration on larger issues, such as advocating for adjustments in laws and regulations concerning hobby poultry farming.
		Learning and adaptation	Learning and adaptation are crucial in the Herenboeren community, involving the acquisition of new knowledge and skills to adjust strategies in response to changing circumstances. "Learning by doing" is emphasized both within CFC and HB NL. Experimentation is essential due to the novelty of the concept, and lessons are drawn from the experiences and choices made. Each location's uniqueness in developing a nature-driven, socially connected, and economically sustainable production system requires a deep understanding of the local environment, leading to active experimentation, such as selecting the right chicken breed. The 7th principle of the Herenboeren model highlights being an active part of a learning and experimenting network. Sharing experiences and learning together occurs through farmer days and a farming app, yet the lack of a dedicated platform limits broader exchange between cooperatives and HB NL. While HB NL is working on "Mijn Herenboeren" to facilitate knowledge sharing, communities are taking their own initiative to share knowledge and experiences in the absence of an official platform.
		Individual and collective action	The concept of individual and collective action is crucial within the Herenboeren community. Both personal contributions of individuals and joint efforts of groups are evident in pursuing organizational goals. All employees of HB NL are intrinsically motivated to take action which is also required for effective functioning within HB NL. In the CFC, a small group of members actively engages in defined groups, often committees and working groups, for achieving shared objectives. However, there's a challenge with some members feeling uncertain about how to contribute. The absence of mechanisms for individual, voluntary actions is noted. Furthermore there's a distinction between early and later CFCs in terms of member expectations. Clearer expectations in later CFCs have attracted the right members.
	Action spacing	Local-cultural organisational context	Within HB NL an egalitarian organizational culture developed and was effective in the pioneer phase, there is now a shift, marked by the reorganisation of the internal organisation. E.g. establishment of a Management Team for quicker decision-making. However, some employees find it difficult to cope with the transition to a more managerial organisation culture. Not being involved in decision-making process results in feelings of undervaluation. For the CFCs integrating into the local context faces challenges due to cultural clashes, particularly in areas with a strong conventional agricultural culture. Despite this, CFCs actively work on integration, fostering better understanding over time. Collaboration with educational institutions is strong, aiming to connect people with nature and educate children about food origins. Notably, CFCs in rural areas with an aging population encounter difficulties in attracting enough members, due to the fact that older generations are less motivated to contribute to change.
		Potential and opportunities	Within HB NL, there are untapped opportunities and growth prospects, especially in the service sector, requiring more agricultural knowledge and increased presence at locations. There is also a lack of structure and direction within HB NL, connected to an unclear plan for last year. This leads to uncertainty among employees. For the CFC, the most significant gains can be made in the social domain. Mobilizing community resources requires the development of a sense of community and ownership. Achieving social aspects such as involvement and responsibility proves to be challenging constructs to realize.
Limitations and constrains		The organization faces several challenges that constrain its operations. Financial limitations persist despite a loan from Triodos, and are the result wrong spendings and the development of less CFCs than anticipated. Resulting in the downscaling of services and the dismissing employees. The absence of a social intranet and the right collaboration and communication tools results in limited knowledge exchange and only interactions between HB NL and boards and farmers. Next is the problem of acquiring suitable agricultural land, leading to considerations of blueprint adjustments for future initiatives. Legal and regulatory hurdles create continuous issues for both new and existing locations. The voluntariness of the Herenboeren model poses challenges in enforcing responsibilities and addressing resource scarcity.	
Impact and outcomes		The Herenboeren movement has grown in recent years to 18 cooperatives producing food in a nature-driven manner, showcasing a growing impact. However, challenges such as land scarcity, financial constraints, and regulatory issues have limited the expected growth for 2023, resulting in the establishment of only 2 new farms instead of the planned 4. The evolving organizational structure allows for adaptability but also poses challenges, leading to unintended consequences like a decline in memberships after overproduction. A dedicated yet small group within the movement often feels demotivated due to a perceived lack of recognition, resulting in high turnover in committees and boards. Despite these challenges, the positive impact is much bigger. The CFCs connect people with their food, promoting healthy eating habits, revitalize local environments, fostering biodiversity, and harmonious collaboration with nature, forming friendships, and caring for each other and the land.	

Elements of the social practice of leadership	Competences	Leadership embodies a diverse spectrum of competences, merging organizational, relational, and specialized skills. Organizational proficiency, marked by management and hands-on problem-solving abilities, ensures effective coordination. Flexibility and adaptability navigate the dynamic landscape, intertwined with strategic thinking. Relational and communicative skills, including inspirational abilities and emotional intelligence, fosters meaningful connections. Analytical skills underpin decision-making, complemented by self-awareness and reflective capacity. Specialized knowledge, spanning organizational, agricultural, and institutional domains, forms the bedrock for successful involvement in leadership interactions.
	Meanings	Leadership is understood as a distributed and shared phenomenon, emphasizing collective engagement and community involvement. Furthermore leadership is viewed as having a dynamic and evolving nature. Direction, consistency, prioritizing, and moral management form a compass, guiding actions with ethical purpose. Servanthood and equality become integral, portraying leadership as a selfless practice. The role model aspect illustrates the influential power in shaping behaviors and values. Additionally, personal leadership and self-steering underscore autonomy.
	Materials	A dynamic fusion of people, communication tools, time and financial resources, as well as physical work environments and locations. People, representing the human capital, constitute the core material. Although specific individuals with formal roles such as the farm manager, the farm board, chairman of the cooperative and employees and in particular the executive committee and MT of HB NL are most active in leadership interactions the practice involves a much more diverse group of people across the organisation with different skills, perspectives, and collaborative efforts. Communication tools serve as connective tissues, facilitating the exchange of ideas and information essential for effective steering and facilitating inclusivity and transparency. Time and financial resources act as constraining component. Locations and physical work environments form the spatial backdrop, influencing the practical manifestation, stimulating and facilitating the involvement community members and the overall quality of leadership interactions. Together, these materials are the tangible elements that the carriers or hosts of the practice navigate and mobilize within Alternative Food Networks, emphasizing the intricate interplay between human, technological, temporal, and spatial components.

* Action spacing, which was consciously omitted from the research, has been integrated into the code framework, as it proved beneficial in organizing codes.

Adviesrapport Leiderschap in de Herenboerenbeweging

Gebaseerd op de onderzoeksresultaten worden in dit adviesrapport een breed scala aan relevante inzichten en strategische kansen voor verbetering behandeld, met als doel de ontwikkeling van de beweging te stimuleren en een bijdrage te leveren aan het bereiken van organisatiedoelstellingen.

Het adviesrapport bestaat uit drie secties. De eerste sectie behandelt de scope van het onderzoek en de onderzoeksmethoden voor het evalueren van leiderschap, waarbij tevens de belangrijkste resultaten worden gepresenteerd. Deze eerste sectie verschaft de lezer een contextuele achtergrond voor het interpreteren van de voornaamste verbeterpunten die in sectie twee worden besproken. Voor elk verbeterpunt worden de huidige stand van zaken, uitdagingen en beperkingen beschreven, samen met praktische aanbevelingen. Deze aanbevelingen zijn op maat gemaakt voor effectieve implementatie, met als overkoepelend doel de verwezenlijking van structurele veranderingen. Het adviesrapport wordt afgesloten met een conclusie in de vorm van een eindadvies.

Voor uitgebreide inzichten in de beoefening van leiderschap, de effecten van leiderschap en het samenspel tussen agency en structure wordt verwezen naar het onderzoeksrapport. Hierin worden ook de resultaten van een uitgebreid literatuur onderzoek beschreven welke mogelijk interessante inzichten kunnen opleveren voor de beweging en inzicht geven in de onderzoeken die er tot op heden zijn uitgevoerd naar alternatieve voedsel netwerken (AFNs) in transitiestudies met een actor-georiënteerde benadering.

1. Context schetsing: Leiderschap in de Herenboeren beweging

Leiderschapsstudies zijn traditioneel gericht geweest op het idee dat leiderschap een eigenschap is van het individu. Echter, sinds het begin van deze eeuw heeft er een alternatieve focus op leiderschap plaatsgevonden. Deze benadering stelt dat collectieve, distributieve en collaboratieve vormen van leiderschap essentieel zijn voor de succesvolle ontwikkeling van moderne organisaties, die worden gekenmerkt door een platte hiërarchie en een op projecten en teams gerichte organisatiestructuur. Deze nieuwe kijk op leiderschap is gebaseerd op drie aannames:

- 1) Leiderschap omvat meerdere individuen die leiderschapsrollen op zich nemen, zowel formeel als informeel, en samenwerken over organisatorische grenzen heen.
- 2) Leiderschapsrollen en taken worden gedecentraliseerd, waardoor er 'leiders op vele niveaus en in verschillende domeinen' ontstaan.
- 3) Leiderschap wordt begrepen in termen van praktijken en interventies, niet alleen in termen van eigenschappen en relaties tussen leiders en volgers.

Het centraal stellen van de sociale activiteit

Om daadwerkelijk af te stappen van het idee dat leiderschap een kenmerk is van het individu en leiderschap te onderzoeken in lijn met de drie aannames van deze nieuwe benadering is er in dit onderzoek een 'practice approach' toegepast. Dit betekent dat leiderschap wordt gezien als sociale praktijk of beter gezegd een sociale activiteit. Deze benadering gaat uit van het idee dat (sociale)structuren 'agency', de mogelijkheid van het individu om invloed uit te oefenen, mogelijk kunnen maken maar ook kunnen belemmeren. Tegelijkertijd zorgen actoren met agency voor de ontwikkeling, reproductie en transformatie van deze zelfde structuren. Om een illustratie te geven wat dit nu eigenlijk betekend. De interne organisatie dynamieken, de organisatiecultuur, de betrokken partijen etc. vormen structuren die het mogelijk maken voor werknemers om een actieve bijdrage te leveren. Ook kan het zo zijn dat deze structuren de werknemers belemmeren. Tegelijkertijd is het zo dat

de actoren met agency deze zelfde structuren kunnen veranderen door bijvoorbeeld de aanpassing van het governance model.

Deze benadering maakt een meer genuanceerd begrip mogelijk van hoe individuen en maatschappelijke structuren elkaar voortdurend vormen en beïnvloeden in de voortdurende dynamiek van het dagelijks leven.

Het beoefenen van leiderschap

Met een beter begrip van de leiderschapsbenadering van het uitgevoerde onderzoek gaan we nu eerst kijken waar de sociale activiteit van leiderschap uit bestaat binnen de Herenboeren beweging. Voor het onderzoeken van leiderschap is gebruikgemaakt van Social Practice Theory. Volgens deze theorie bestaat de entiteit van een sociale activiteit uit drie bouwstenen: betekenissen, competenties en (fysieke) materialen. Deze bouwstenen zijn onderzocht aan de hand van interviews met verschillende mensen—van community leden tot de directie van HB NL—en observaties van sociale interacties in verschillende contexten, zoals teamvergaderingen, werkdagen op het land, vergaderingen van werkgroepen en algemene ledenvergaderingen.

Onderstaande figuur geeft een overzicht van leiderschap als entiteit binnen de Herenboeren beweging.

Organizational skills

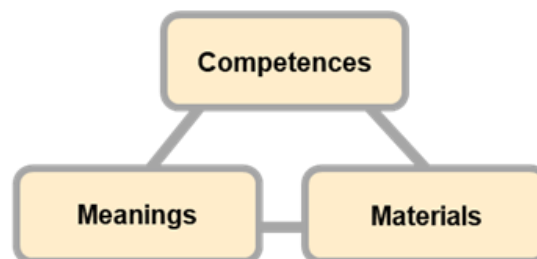
- Management skills
- Hands-on Mentality and Problem-solving Ability
- Flexibility and Adaptability
- Strategic thinking

Relational- and Communicative skills

- Inspirational abilities
- Argumentation skills
- Social skills and Emotional intelligence
- Analytical skills
- Self-knowledge and Reflective ability

Specialized knowledge

- Organizational knowledge
- Agricultural knowledge
- Institutional knowledge



- Distributed and Shared phenomenon
- Dynamic and Evolving practice
- Direction, Consistency, Prioritizing and Moral management
- Servanthood and Equality
- Role model
- Personal leadership and Self-steering
- People
- Communication tools
- Time and Financial resources
- Locations and Physical work environments

Betekeningen

Het gaat hier over interpretaties en begripsvorming—symbolische betekenissen, ideeën, emoties, overtuigingen en inzichten die verband houden met leiderschap.

Binnen de Herenboerenbeweging wordt leiderschap gezien als een genuanceerd samenspel van diverse betekenissen. Het is in essentie een gedistribueerd en gedeeld fenomeen, waarbij de nadruk ligt op collectieve betrokkenheid en gemeenschapsinspanning. De dynamische en evoluerende aard van leiderschap benadrukt aanpassingsvermogen, waarbij de steeds veranderende aard van HB NL/de Herenboerderij en het bredere landschap erkend worden. Moreel management fungeert als een kompas

voor het geven van richting en besluitvorming. Dienstbaarheid en gelijkheid worden gezien als integrale aspecten; leiderschap wordt afgebeeld als een onzelfzuchtige praktijk gericht op het bevorderen van inclusiviteit, begrip voor uiteenlopende argumenten en collaboratieve probleemoplossing. Het aspect van het rolmodel illustreert de invloedrijke kracht van personen met een formele verantwoordelijkheid bij het vormgeven van gedrag en het stimuleren van actieve betrokkenheid. Daarnaast benadrukken persoonlijk leiderschap en zelfsturing autonomie, met de nadruk op individuele actie binnen het bredere collectieve verhaal. Het gaat hierbij over de intrinsieke motivatie van het individu die voortkomen uit gevoelens van competentie.

Competenties

Gaat over kennis en vaardigheden die worden gebruikt tijdens de beoefening van leiderschap, deze worden vaak geleerd door ervaring en training.

Leiderschap in de Herenboerenbeweging belichaamt een breed spectrum aan competenties, waarbij organisatorische vaardigheden, relationele- en communicatieve vaardigheden en gespecialiseerde kennis samenkomen. Organisatorische vaardigheden, gekenmerkt door management en praktische probleemoplossing, helpen de boerderij in operationeel opzicht. Flexibiliteit, aanpassingsvermogen en strategisch denken vergemakkelijken het navigeren door het dynamische landschap. Analytische vaardigheden vormen de basis voor besluitvorming, aangevuld met zelfbewustzijn en reflectief vermogen. Gespecialiseerde kennis, die zich uitstrekt over organisatorische, agrarische en institutionele domeinen, is belangrijk voor succesvolle leiderschapsinteracties. Relationele en communicatieve vaardigheden vormen de bakermat voor het voortbestaan en effectieve sturing en ontwikkeling van de Herenboerderij en een sociaal verbonden gemeenschap. In dit opzicht zijn inspirerende vaardigheden en emotionele intelligentie het belangrijkste.

(Fysieke)Materialen

Materialen omvatten verschillende tastbare elementen, technologieën en fysieke entiteiten die betrokken zijn bij de beoefening van leiderschap.

In de Herenboerenbeweging is het ‘materialen’ element een ingewikkeld samenspel van fysieke lichamen, communicatietools, tijd en financiële middelen, evenals fysieke werkomgevingen en locaties. Mensen vertegenwoordigen de ‘carriers or hosts’ (belichaming) van de sociale activiteit leiderschap. De beoefening van leiderschap gebeurt veelal door specifieke individuen met formele rollen, zoals de boerderijmanager, het boerderijbestuur, de voorzitter van de coöperatie en werknemers, met name het MT en directie van HB NL. Leiderschap wordt echter beoefend door een meer diverse groep mensen binnen de organisatie, die elk verschillende vaardigheden, perspectieven en samenwerkingsinspanningen bijdragen. Communicatietools fungeren als verbinder en zorgen voor de uitwisseling van ideeën en informatie—essentieel is voor effectieve sturing—en bevorderen daarnaast inclusiviteit en transparantie. Tijd en financiële middelen fungeren als beperkende componenten die de betrokkenheid van actoren vormen en de aard en frequentie van leiderschapsinteracties bepalen. Locaties en fysieke werkomgevingen vormen het ruimtelijke decor, beïnvloeden de beoefening van leiderschap, stimuleren en vergemakkelijken de betrokkenheid van de gemeenschap en de algehele kwaliteit van leiderschapsinteracties.

De impact van leiderschap

We hebben gezien dat leiderschap een verspreid en gedeeld fenomeen is. Echter willen we ook weten wat de impact is van de wijze waarop leiderschap wordt beoefend.

Uitdagingen

Het meest diepgaande negatieve effect van de huidige manier waarop leiderschap wordt beoefend, is de beperkte ontwikkeling van een concrete visie en richting—het definiëren van een duidelijk en coherent pad voor de organisatie. Zonder de vaststelling van een duidelijke richting worden medewerkers van HB NL aan zelfsturing overgelaten, wat, hoewel in lijn met de filosofie van de beweging, wordt belemmerd door het ontbreken van consistente werkmethoden. Als gevolg hiervan hebben medewerkers van HB NL en teams soms moeite om te identificeren waar ze aan moeten werken en, nog belangrijker, waar ze niet aan moeten werken. Op de Herenboerderij ligt de verantwoordelijkheid voor het bepalen van de koers voornamelijk bij het bestuur. Het bestuur erkent echter dat ze ook vrijwilligers zijn en mogelijk niet in staat zijn om op alle fronten richting te geven. Daarom uiten zowel het bestuur als de boeren de behoefte aan meer begeleiding en ondersteuning van HB NL bij het vaststellen van een visie en strategische richting om besluitvorming en acties te sturen. Het feit dat leiderschap verspreid is onder meerdere individuen en groepen mensen, in plaats van geconcentreerd te zijn in een traditionele hiërarchische structuur, kan effectief zijn. Een goed georganiseerde interne structuur met gestructureerde werkmethoden, duidelijke afspraken en goede communicatiemiddelen is een cruciale voorwaarde. Omdat deze elementen momenteel onvoldoende aanwezig zijn, leidt de waargenomen praktijk van leiderschap tot grote coördinatie-uitdagingen. Verder maken de resultaten duidelijk dat leiderschap wordt beoefend door verschillende individuen binnen zelf gedefinieerde domeinen. De meeste domeinen bestaan echter niet geïsoleerd; ze maken deel uit van grotere processen waarin domeinen samenvallen en overlappen. Omdat de meeste mensen geneigd zijn te denken in termen van projecten in plaats van processen, gebrek hebben aan bewustzijn van wie verantwoordelijk is voor welk domein, en vaak niet veel kennis hebben over wat de domeinen inhouden, ontstaan er inefficiënties in werkzaamheden. Ter illustratie, vragen vanuit de Herenboerderijen komen bij de verkeerde mensen binnen. Deze vragen worden vervolgens doorgestuurd, onbeantwoord gelaten of beheerd door personen die er niet bij betrokken zouden moeten zijn. Bovendien weten individuen soms niet hoe ze bepaalde kwesties moeten aanpakken, wat leidt tot het opwaarts delegeren van problemen naar directie, wat vertragingen veroorzaakt. Het resulteert ook soms in langdurig gezamenlijk nadenken over kwesties. Beslissingen worden vervolgens laat genomen of slechts gedeeltelijk. Een voorbeeld is de naamsverandering van de beweging. Vanuit verschillende perspectieven, zowel intern als extern, bestaat er ontevredenheid over de naam ‘Herenboeren’—de naam geeft mensen de indruk van iets elitairs. Boeren gaven ook aan dat de naam ‘Herenboeren Nederland’ suggereert dat er sprake is van een hiërarchie waar HB NL aan het roer staat. Als gevolg daarvan zijn verschillende individuen binnen HB NL begonnen met het verkennen van de mogelijkheden tot een naamswijziging en het afwegen van de voor- en nadelen. Dit werd aan de coöperaties gecommuniceerd, maar een jaar later zijn de discussies nog steeds gaande, en uiteindelijk is besloten om de naam op dit moment niet te veranderen. Het resultaat is dat veel mensen bij dit onderwerp betrokken zijn geweest zonder tastbare resultaten. Met dergelijke zaken moet een concrete en snelle beslissing worden genomen, deze communiceren, en het belangrijkste, er niet op terugkomen. De huidige leiderschapspraktijken leiden dus tot inefficiënties. Het sturen en coördineren van kwesties kost veel tijd en levert niet de kwaliteit op die door iemand anders binnen de organisatie had kunnen worden geleverd. De diffuse en niet geformaliseerde aard van leiderschap voor verschillende domeinen resulteert in onduidelijke verantwoordelijkheden en ambiguïteit over verantwoordelijkheden. Bovendien zorgt dit ervoor dat individuen zich niet verantwoordelijk voelen voor specifieke zaken, en tegelijkertijd gaan mensen vingers wijzen—de coöperaties uiten ontevredenheid over de prestaties van HB NL. Dit komt deels door de onzekerheid rond de samenwerkingsrelatie en de afbakening van taken en verantwoordelijkheden.

Positieve effecten

De huidige wijze waarop leiderschap wordt beoefend creëert een omgeving waarin diverse stemmen en perspectieven worden gewaardeerd en geïntegreerd in besluitvormings- en processen van probleemoplossing—er is een hoge mate van inclusiviteit. Dit zorgt dat verschillende perspectieven, ideeën en visies de ruimte krijgen wat resulteert in een hoog niveau van innovatie en creativiteit, waardoor de responsiviteit op verandering wordt verbeterd—de capaciteit van een organisatie om zich aan te passen en te evolueren in het licht van veranderende externe en interne omstandigheden. De bestrijding van de coloradokever op een Herenboerderij is een uitstekend voorbeeld van innovatie als gevolg van inclusiviteit. Een lid bouwde een keververdelger met elektrische aandrijving. Verbazingwekkend genoeg werkte het opmerkelijk goed: in de eerste proef veegde de verdelger tientallen kevers van een rij planten af. Om de kevers uit de opvangbak te zuigen, werd een handstofzuiger gebruikt. Een ander lid was nieuwsgierig om te zien of deze dezelfde functie als de verdelger kon vervullen, en het bleek dat het direct op de planten gebruiken ervan fantastisch werkte, waarbij gemakkelijk tientallen kevers van een rij werden gezogen. Het hele aardappelveld kon nu in twee uur worden doorkruist. Als gevolg daarvan zijn er niet langer 4-6 mensen nodig die een hele dag besteden aan het met de hand verwijderen van de kevers. Verder bevordert de waargenomen vorm van leiderschap een cultuur van teamwork, wederzijdse ondersteuning en stimuleert het collaboratieve probleemoplossing. Aangezien iedereen binnen HB NL en de meeste actieve individuen binnen de coöperaties betrokken zijn bij processen van richting en coördinatie (leiderschapsinteracties), en elke persoon unieke kwaliteiten en expertise bezit, kunnen deze worden gecombineerd om het oplossen van problemen te vergemakkelijken. Zo leidt de praktijk van leiderschap tot talrijke actoren en verschillende mensen die samenwerken om complexe kwesties en uitdagingen te identificeren, analyseren en op te lossen. Ter illustratie: een coöperatie lid, met een achtergrond in communicatie, werving en selectie, ontwikkelde een wervingsplan, dat vervolgens werd uitgevoerd door een toegewijde werkgroep die voor dit doel was opgericht. De samenwerking tussen deze individuen was essentieel. Geen van beide partijen had het individueel kunnen oplossen, aangezien beide richting geven op verschillende gebieden (strategisch en uitvoerend). Bovendien krijgen individuen op verschillende niveaus de kans om leiderschapsvaardigheden te ontwikkelen, wat bijdraagt aan hun persoonlijke en professionele groei. Tijdens de interviews werd ook duidelijk dat verschillende individuen waardevolle inzichten hebben verworven tijdens de beoefening van leiderschap. De huidige vorm van leiderschap resulteert daarom in leren en aanpassing—het proces van het verwerven van nieuwe kennis, vaardigheden en inzichten, en het gebruik ervan om strategieën en acties aan te passen in reactie op veranderende omstandigheden en lessen die zijn geleerd uit ervaring. Ter illustratie, een boer vertelde over de samenwerking en aansturing van leden: “Het is een heel ander type om mee te werken, omdat ik hiervoor betaald krijg, dus als er iets van mij wordt gevraagd, moet ik soms echt hard werken om het voor elkaar te krijgen. Terwijl wanneer ik een lid om iets vraag, ik heel bewust moet zijn van hun vrijwillige inzet. Ik heb ooit een fout gemaakt door te laat met koffie te beginnen. Ik heb die dag zeker de gevolgen gevoeld. Ik zei, ja, laten we dit eerst afmaken. Uiteindelijk waren we anderhalf uur later aan de koffietafel. Iedereen was helemaal uitgeput. Nu weet ik dat als ik eerder een koffiepauze inplan, ik vaak nog twee uur kan doorwerken na de pauze.”

De recursieve relatie tussen leiderschap en organisatiestructuren

Om de beschreven uitdagingen en positieve effecten in het juiste licht te plaatsen is het belangrijk terug te keren naar de recursieve relatie tussen agency en structure. Leiderschap is zelf een vorm van agency, gevormd door structuren—het bieden van de mogelijkheid om betrokken te zijn bij leiderschapsinteracties en daardoor invloed uit te oefenen, komt voort uit de bredere structuren. Daarom is leiderschap niet de katalysator die netwerkdeelnemers in staat stelt hun doelstellingen te bereiken. Het zijn de structuren, die als drijvende kracht fungeren. De inzichten verkregen tijdens interviews en observaties maken duidelijk dat interne organisatiedynamieken de meest prominente factor is die netwerkdeelnemers ervan weerhoudt bij te dragen aan het bereiken van organisatiedoelstellingen. Dit komt door het feit dat, zowel binnen HB NL als binnen de coöperaties, individuen te veel ruimte krijgen

en te weinig middelen—overmatige vrijheid wordt een beperking omdat groepen, teams, commissies, individuen afhankelijk zijn van structuren om sociale handelingen, zoals leiderschap, uit te voeren.

Conclusie

De bevindingen illustreren dat het governance-model, de interne organisatiedynamiek, de overtuigingen en begrip van leiderschap, en de betrokkenheid van actoren leiden tot een transcendentie van de klassieke leider-volgerrelatie. Leiderschap wordt een dynamisch en gedeeld sociaal fenomeen dat wordt uitgevoerd door een scala aan mensen binnen de organisatie. In de beoefening van leiderschap nemen relationele- en communicatieve vaardigheden een centrale plaats in, gevolgd door managementvaardigheden en gespecialiseerde kennis. Deze leiderschapsbenadering resulteert in innovatie, creativiteit, collaboratieve probleemoplossing, draagt bij aan persoonlijke groei en stimuleert betrokkenheid. Echter, het resulteert ook in de beperkte vaststelling van een collectieve richting, coördinatie-uitdagingen, inefficiënties op het werk, en verantwoordelijkheidskwesties.

Bovendien biedt de organisatievorm en governance van de beweging de mogelijkheid voor iedereen om betrokken te zijn bij leiderschapsinteracties, waardoor zij de mogelijkheid hebben om invloed uit te oefenen in het sturen en ontwikkelen van een op natuur gericht, sociaal verbonden en economisch duurzaam voedselsysteem. De organisatiestructuren zijn echter te los—netwerkteelmers krijgen te veel ruimte en te weinig middelen. Om ervoor te zorgen dat de waargenomen vorm van leiderschap effectiever wordt en optimaal kan bijdragen aan het behalen van de doelstellingen van de organisatie, moet de aandacht worden gericht op de structurele kant, in het bijzonder de interne organisatie dynamieken.

2. Adviezen voor verbetering

Dienstverlening HB NL

Huidige situatie

HB NL opereert geïsoleerd, stemt de dienstverlening af zonder een volledig overzicht te hebben van de wensen en behoeften van de coöperaties. Verder is het aanbod van dienstverlening te breed voor de realisatiekracht van HB NL.

Implicaties

Ontevredenheid over de dienstverlening van HB NL. inefficiënte middelen allocatie en onvoldoende kwaliteit van de huidige dienstverlening.

Uitdagingen & aanbevelingen

Verbeter de Fysieke Aanwezigheid:

- Plan regelmatige bezoeken aan alle coöperaties om in contact te komen met leden, hun behoeften te begrijpen en sterkere banden op te bouwen.
- Organiseer face-to-face vergaderingen of workshops op de boerderijen om dienstenaanbod te bespreken, zorgen aan te pakken en directe feedback te verzamelen.

Diensten Aanpassen aan Specifieke Behoeften:

- Houd enquêtes of interviews met leden om specifieke behoeften, voorkeuren en gebieden te identificeren waar de diensten van HB NL de meeste impact kunnen hebben.
- Stroomlijn dienstenaanbiedingen om te focussen op kerngebieden die overeenkomen met de geïdentificeerde behoeften en aanzienlijk bijdragen aan het succes van de coöperaties.

Aanvullende Dienstverlening:

- Bied de mogelijkheid tot overleg over aanvullende dienstverlening op basis van specifieke omstandigheden en prioriteiten. Of bied een aanvullend dienstenpakket aan waaruit de coöperaties kunnen kiezen tegen aanbetaling.

Relatie tussen HB NL en de coöperaties

Huidige situatie

Grote afstand tussen de coöperaties en HB NL. Communicatie vanuit HB NL verloopt enkel via de besturen en de fysieke aanwezigheid van HB NL op de boerderijen is beperkt. Verder bestaat er weinig transparantie in de werkwijze en het handelen van HB NL. De gemeenschappen weten niet waar de jaarlijkse afdracht aan besteed wordt. Verder hebben veel coöperaties diep gewortelde herinneringen aan dingen die in het verleden fout zijn gegaan.

Implicaties

Vermindering van vertrouwen en ontwikkeling van argwaan naar HB NL. het ontstaan van een gevoel van hiërarchie. Het idee dat de coöperaties HB NL niet nodig hebben.

Uitdagingen & aanbevelingen

- Verbeter de communicatie naar de gemeenschap door de aanlevering van memo's aan de besturen
- Geef de coöperaties inzicht in de begroting en het jaarplan van HB NL.
- Maak een concreet overzicht waar de jaarlijkse afdracht aan besteed wordt.

Realisatiekracht van de coöperaties

Huidige situatie

Interne organisatie dynamieken zijn te los geformuleerd. Leden willen graag een bijdrage leveren maar weten niet hoe.

Implicaties

Er ontstaat een gevoel van machteloosheid. Vooral binnen al gedefinieerde werkgroepen en commissies.

Uitdagingen & aanbevelingen

- HB NL kan een verbeterpunten lijst ontwikkelen voor de coöperaties. Werkgroepen en commissies binnen de gemeenschappen kunnen vervolgens zelf verbeterpunten selecteren waaraan ze willen werken.
- Het is dan wel belangrijk dat er voor themagebieden voor verbetering ondersteunende middelen beschikbaar zijn. Bv. plan voor monitoring biodiversiteit, overzicht mogelijke inrichtingsmaatregelen dierverblijven etc.

Gemeenschapsontwikkeling

Huidige situatie

De coöperaties hebben moeite met de realisatie van een sociaal verbonden gemeenschap.

Implicaties

Coöperaties worstelen met het organiseren van arbeid om dat het gevoel van eigenaarschap omdat de verantwoordelijkheid beperkt is.

Uitdagingen & aanbevelingen

- Een uitdaging is het realiseren van een sociaal verbonden gemeenschap bestaand uit 200 huishoudens. Het is beter om te streven naar kleinere sociale verbonden groepen van max 20 mensen. Hiervoor is het belangrijk kleine groepjes mensen de verantwoordelijkheid over een bepaalde activiteit of gebied te geven.
- het oprichten van ‘betrokkenheidscommissie’ die gestandaardiseerde tevredenheidsonderzoeken onder leden uitvoeren en discussieavonden organiseren waar leden kunnen samenwerken aan aspiraties, uitdagingen en toekomststrategieën.

Aansturing van de gemeenschap

Huidige situatie

Boeren en besturen worstelen met het mobiliseren en aansturen van de leden. De vrijwilligheid van bestuursleden en daardoor beperkte tijdsinvestering is een belangrijke factor. Verder hebben de boeren hun handen vol aan operationele taken.

Implicaties

Leden geven aan dat ze meer verwachten van de boeren en het bestuur- ze moeten zorgen voor de aansturing van de gemeenschap. Als gevolg ontstaat er ‘finger pointing’. Leden kijken naar de boer en het bestuur en zei kijken naar HB NL.

Uitdagingen & aanbevelingen

- Uitdaging is de omgang met vrijwilligheid van de bestuursleden en de hoge werkdruk van de boeren.
- Ook hier kunnen middelen vanuit HB NL een bijdrage leveren. Deze middelen kunnen door de besturen worden aangereikt aan groepen binnen de gemeenschap om ze zo een richting te geven.
- Het bieden van leiderschapstraining- en ontwikkelingsprogramma’s die boeren en besturen beter instaat stellen om effectiever leiderschapsrollen op zich te nemen.

3. Een slot woord: Leren en experimenteren

De bevindingen illustreren dat leiderschap binnen de Herenboerenbeweging een gedistribueerd en gedeeld fenomeen is. Hoewel deze benadering door hedendaagse leiderschapsstudies als essentieel wordt beschouwd om te voldoen aan de behoeften van moderne organisaties, toont dit onderzoek aan dat een dergelijke leiderschapsbenadering niet automatisch succes garandeert. Wanneer de interne organisatiedynamieken te los is, leidt een gedistribueerde en gedeelde leiderschapsbenadering tot uitdagingen op het gebied van coördinatie, werk-efficiëntie en een beperkte vaststelling van een algemene richting. De bevindingen tonen ook aan dat individuen die betrokken zijn bij leiderschapsactiviteiten een actieve rol spelen in het vormgeven van organisatiestructuren, waarbij de terugkerende relatie tussen agency en structuur wordt benadrukt. Voor verbetering, verdere ontwikkeling, en het leveren van een bijdrage in het behalen van organisatiedoelstellingen moet rekening worden gehouden met de wisselwerking tussen leiderschap en organisatiestructuren. Hiervoor zijn adaptieve organisatiestructuren nodig om veranderingen in leiderschapsrollen op te vangen, te reageren op opkomende uitdagingen en te profiteren van groei- en innovatiemogelijkheden. Voor de Herenboerenbeweging hebben de huidige organisatiestructuren, gebaseerd op democratische waarden en een egalitaire organisatiecultuur, geleid tot langdurig collectief nadenken over een nieuw governance-model. Een organisatiestructuur die in staat is om snel beslissingen te nemen wanneer dat nodig is, had de vertraging bij de implementatie van een nieuw governance-model kunnen voorkomen. Dit zou op zijn beurt de ontwikkeling en groei van de organisatie hebben ondersteund, aangezien een meer geschikt governance-model sneller had kunnen worden geïmplementeerd. Bovendien kan het bieden van leiderschapstraining- en ontwikkelingsprogramma's individuen binnen de Herenboerenbeweging in

staat stellen om effectiever leiderschapsrollen op zich te nemen. Dit verbetert niet alleen de leiderschapsvaardigheden binnen de organisatie, maar draagt ook bij aan de algehele robuustheid van het netwerk. Binnen het boerenopleidingsprogramma kan de nadruk worden gelegd op het effectief managen van diverse groepen op de boerderij. Bovendien kunnen open Webinars worden georganiseerd over strategieën om de motivatie van leden te vergroten om actie te ondernemen. De implementatie van regelmatige feedbackmechanismen zorgt voor een voortdurend dialoog tussen boeren, het bestuur en HB NL aan de ene kant, en gemeenschapsleden aan de andere kant - dit vergemakkelijkt een beter begrip van de veranderende behoeften van de gemeenschap, waardoor aanpassingen in leiderschapsbenaderingen en organisatiestructuren indien nodig mogelijk zijn. De eerste stappen kunnen het oprichten van ‘betrokkenheidscomités’ omvatten, die gestandaardiseerde tevredenheidsonderzoeken onder leden uitvoeren en discussieavonden organiseren waar leden kunnen samenwerken aan aspiraties, uitdagingen en toekomststrategieën. Gezamenlijk kunnen deze initiatieven de relaties tussen belanghebbenden, effectievere begeleiding en aanpassing, en de voortdurende verbetering van de bedrijfsvoering op de boerderijen bevorderen.

Als kritisch agrarisch onderzoeker wil ik afsluiten met de notie dat uitdagingen van de Herenboerenbeweging vanuit een positieve invalshoek moeten worden benaderd. De unieke kenmerken van de beweging creëren een beschermde ruimtes voor innovatie, leren en experimenteren, waarbij voortdurende verbetering en verhoogde responsiviteit op verandering worden gestimuleerd—van het bewerken van het land en het opbouwen van gemeenschappen met sterke relaties tot het vormgeven van leiderschapspraktijken en organisatiestructuren. Aangezien de meest waardevolle lessen vaak voortkomen uit fouten, is de waardering en ondersteuning van een organisatiecultuur van ‘learning by doing’ van groot belang - het omarmen van de kracht van hun alternatief-zijn moet altijd centraal worden gesteld!