
Preface

I am truly grateful for having met many new people, for their stories, opinions, and inspiration in developing this book.

While I am writing this acknowledgment the first draft is ready. I realize that writing this book gave me the fulfillment that I needed in this stage of my scholarly life. I am grateful to many people, too many to mention by name. I recall those who participated as respondents during the research; those who showed a sincere interest in the project; friends who frequently called to ask how I was doing, some who invited me or dropped by for a chat. Writing such a book makes you at times invisible for the outside world. The computer with your data, the Internet, and your own creative sources become your best friends. By showing attention, friends reminded me of the external world out there.

Life is for learning and the greatest gift one can get is meeting people who contribute to this learning. Each of them, in their own way, has contributed to my learning. I think I have met many like-minded people with the aspiration to contribute to what really matters in private and professional life. I have seen how they take responsibility for getting things done. How they rethink situations to find solutions for problems; how their striving for work efficiency goes hand in hand with humane values; how they are pragmatic, using their common sense; and how they honor simplicity.

When I wrote down my findings and reflected upon them, I realized that this book project was a special one, personally and professionally. Personally, because I could relate findings to my experiences with the community care system in the Netherlands. My Mom was suffering from Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (PSP), an illness without effective treatment in the period of 1997–2007. In those years we witnessed the deterioration of her brain's functioning and the increase of care dependency. Hailing from a culture where collectivism and caring for family are important values we tried to avoid too much dependency on professional health care. But when her care demand increased at a certain point in time, we had the choice between finding her a place in an elderly nursing home or keeping her at home and ensuring the care she required in the home environment.

As the first option was not really an option for us, we had to enter and experience how the healthcare industry was organized.

We encountered unfeasible advice from healthcare agencies and oftentimes we noticed the low motivation and the low quality of service amongst nurses and nurse assistants. In those days, there was no Buurtzorg, but I am sure its client's focus would have eased her life in several ways. Instead of a relief, during many visits by care professionals, the complexity and frustration for my Dad increased. Appointments were not met, on some days no professional caregiver showed up, some days we found our Mom half-dressed because the caregiver had to leave, some days they skipped part of her breakfast routines due to their busy schedule, every week many new nurses and caregivers entered the residence, each with their own ideas of how to take care of her and what would be good for her, and also medicine was often not given on time. We followed our hearts and decided to consider alternative ways for making her life as convenient as possible given the circumstances she was in.

Together with my 8 siblings, my Dad, and a few other family members and a small part of professional care offered by private care agencies, especially for those services we were not trained for, we created a team and tried to give her the best possible care, love, and as much comfort as possible. This was the best possible solution we could think of. The higher purpose at Buurtzorg is delivering the best possible care to the client. Our higher purpose was the same. Not every client has so many children able and willing to take care of them. Buurtzorg is then a good alternative, based on what I have seen during my research and the understanding of its approach: it is personal and professional.

Also professionally this project was enriching to me. Those who know my work are aware of my drive for contributing to build an alternative paradigm for management. Having the opportunity to study Buurtzorg has confirmed that some of my previously developed assumptions on entrepreneurship and management are not utopian but could be put into practice: economic and humane outcomes; matter and spirit; discipline and letting go, as two sides of the same coin.

I sincerely hope that this book will contribute to your learning and inspiration on alternative ways of organizing management.

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