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Commencement speech Leiden University College The Hague
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Never give up!

Dear Graduates, ladies and gentlemen, beloved hard working staff of the Leiden University College The Hague, dear dean Jos Schaeken.

It is a great honor for me to deliver the annual commencement speech for the graduates of the, already famous Leiden University College The Hague (LUCTH). Congratulations to you, but also to your parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters and partners. Please, reach out today to your parents, because, without them, you wouldn't be here. They are of course very proud of you, but they also realize that they had to pay a lot of money for this uncertain educational journey of yours. Now that you are graduated, you are supposed to be grown up. So, never throw your parents under the bus again!

The title of this speech "Never give up!" refers to the famous commencement speech of prime minister Winston Churchill at Harrow, his secondary school. Harrow is and was a private school where students were educated in the liberal arts and sciences tradition. They had to work very hard and were more or less isolated from the rest of the world. Your university college is a little bit like Harrow.

Churchill didn't like his school and his results were bad, but the headmaster of Harrow of course, invited him as a famous old Harrovian, to give the commencement speech in October 1941. Churchill succeeded Chamberlain whose appeasement politics had long been heavily criticized by him. That's why he said: Never give in! Never give in! In 1938 Chamberlain had flown to Munich to negotiate with Hitler about the future of Czechoslovakia. After the slaughter of the First World War the West European elites didn't want to start another war, so they fell for the cunning trickery of Mr. Hitler. Churchill had told the British public that all he could offer was blood, toil, tears and sweat and went on to probably his finest hour in the summer of 1940 when a German invasion of Britain was thwarted. After that episode Churchill tried to influence the public mood with upbeat messages. His commencement speech at Harrow in October 1941 "Never give in, never give in!" was an instant classic.

There is some confusion about his words. Some sources remember that he said: never give up which more or less is an equivalent. More or less: give in means indulge or tolerant and give up is to abandon an activity, to stop. In Dutch it is the difference between "toegeven" en "opgeven".

I'm using that title: "Never give up!" Churchill could have said this too. It relates to his own political career – which was not without trouble and went really bad for a long time. There is a strong myth about the leadership of Winston Churchill, but his career was not a linear success story. Generally speaking, careers never are. You will have to realize that, now you are leaving the protecting bubble of the university college. Be careful: the real world is like the average dormitory: you have to clean it before the cleaner arrives!

In this commencement speech I want to suggest a connection between Winston Churchill, world challenges, leadership questions and the curriculum of the Leiden University College The Hague. Winston Churchill was confronted with several world challenges. He took the helm and showed leadership: a combination between command, management and leadership. He had to solve very complex and difficult problems. The world nowadays is confronted with an ever increasing number of such problems, therefore we decided to introduce several world challenges into the curriculum of the College from the beginning. The question is whether or not this was a good decision because world challenges imply normative questions, even more than theoretical or empirical questions. Formulated at an more abstract level: is it useful to introduce normative questions into the courses of the college or is this risky business in science because we then have to deal with non-scientific questions?

World challenges

The decision to create a university college in The Hague was a direct consequence of the policy of the junior education minister at the time, Mark Rutte. Campus The Hague, founded in 1999, was specialized in programs for professionals who already obtained a university degree but were very keen to study Law and Political Science at Campus The Hague in the evening. Rutte decided that he no longer wanted to finance a second university degree which finished off the very successful Law and Political Science evening bachelor programs. So Leiden University Campus The Hague had to think about an alternative. The development of a university college was an important subject in our discussions at the time. Personally, I was impressed by the development of the Utrecht University College and the Roosevelt Academy in Middelburg. They were both initiated by professor Hans Adriaanse. Because of my own negative experiences with large and bureaucratic universities in the Netherlands, I admired the principles of the colleges, which were introduced in the Dutch education landscape. This was, in my opinion a real innovation, characterized by:

1. Small scale education;
2. A strong relation between teacher and student;
3. An learning culture typified by hard working;
4. Courses taught in English ;
5. A broad spectrum of subjects/courses (liberal arts and sciences).

With some colleagues, we went to Middelburg to talk with Hans Adriaanse. He was very critical of the curriculum concept I developed with prof. dr. Chris Goto Jones and argued that the students needed a maximum amount of freedom in choosing their modules. I didn't agree with him. In my opinion it could be a recommendation for the program to select some specific tracks for the curriculum. The Hague was an excellent venue to develop a number of specializations related to its mission as the City of Peace, Justice and Security. These thematic tracks also allowed us to introduce strong normative questions into the program. On that basis we could also create a strong academic community because I believe that young people need a kind of inspiration. The students had to study world challenges and they needed to be world citizens. They should be prepared for possible leadership and try to tackle the complex questions we are confronted with.

I still think we made the right choice and a world challenges curriculum is increasingly justified as the world community is becoming nervous again. Various world challenges almost automatically lead to the rise of normative questions. Building bridges between science and the normative questions of the real world - the world challenges – becomes an ever more pressing issue. For us and for you. Is it possible to study in the bubble of the Leiden University College, when at the same time a lot of people are drowning in het Mediterranean?

Is it acceptable to study at Leiden University College when there are a lot of victims because of the financial and economic crisis? For example in Greece.

Is it possible to study in the college when there is a genocide going on in Syria?

We have to study the societal problems, to formulate different solutions from which politicians can choose. These politicians have to show real leadership. Theories on leadership are a necessary component of the curriculum if you want to solve wicked problems or to be a leader. I will show you why.

Leadership

An interesting idea about leadership and world challenges is formulated by an expert on leadership, Keith Grint, in his book "Leadership, management and Command. Rethinking D-Day, London, 2007: Palgrave Macmillan. In the introduction of the book (p. 16) he introduces a typology. The vertical axis represents increasing uncertainty about the solution of the problems. The problems are critical, tame or wicked. The horizontal axis represents the need for collaboration in resolving the problems. Grint makes a distinction between coercion/physical force, calculative rational procedures and normative emotional influence. The two dimensions lead to three responses: command (provide answers), management (organize the process) and leadership (ask questions).

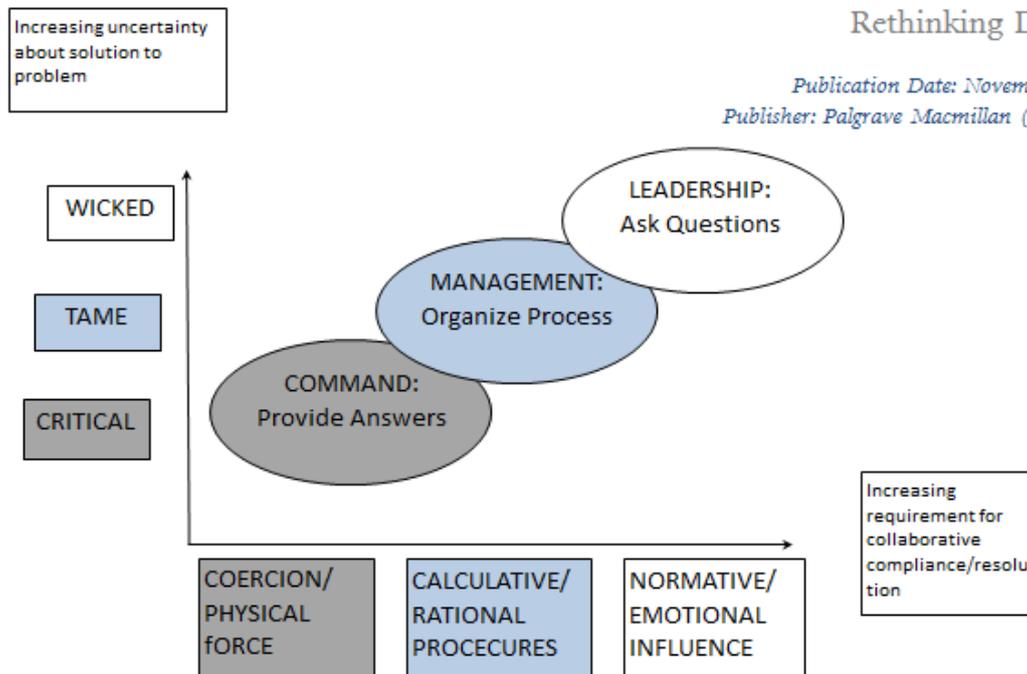


Figure 1.1. Typology of Problems, power and authority

World challenges are wicked problems. A management approach is not sufficient, because we never saw these kinds of problems before. The wicked problem is new to us and so we have no standard management response and the style of command is not appropriate. Wicked problems need leadership. We have to ask questions. The trouble with asking questions is that this will raise new questions; the complexity being that there is no end. The difficulty with wicked problems is that there is no scientific or political consensus about these problems and how to solve them.

Never give up!

The title of this speech “Never give up!” is inspired by the commencement speech of Winston Churchill (1941). The title never give up refers to the difficult process of studying and solving complex societal problems. But it also refers to your learning and career process. Learning and making career is not a linear development. The learning and career process is always characterized by ups and downs. Disjunctions or disruptions are part of your personal, family and professional life.

So, never give up!

Ladies and gentleman,
 Today I'm professor of Governance and public policy at the University of Groningen. I was professor of public administration at this great university and dean of the faculty Campus The Hague and the founding father of Leiden University College The Hague. Today I deliver the commencement speech at this graduation ceremony.

I never expected to do so!

So never give up!

My results at the primary school were really bad!

I worked at a farm.
My dream was to become a bus driver.

Then I went to the secondary school to prepare for university education. I was the first from my family who went to university. Today there are summer schools to prepare you for this difficult task. During the summer school you learn about the habits of the highest social milieus and they help you to eat with knife and fork.

I studied Political Science at the University of Amsterdam. It was a mess. It started with a two week occupation of the main building. The University of Amsterdam still specializes in this twentieth century skill.

So never give up!

I went to Leiden, to develop the department of Public Administration. Everybody thought it would not be successful, because its approach was multi-disciplinary instead of the more conventional mono disciplinary format

Never give up!

In 1999 I was asked by the board of Leiden University to develop the branch of Leiden University. Everybody was skeptical, because there was for example no academic library in the Hague and it took ten minutes by train from Leiden to The Hague.

Never give up!

I wanted to build a university college. Nobody believed in it. Except Lieke Schreel and after that Chris Goto Jones and now Jos Schaeken,

Never give up!

So ladies and gentleman. Don't complain. You are in a better position than I ever have been in! I'm now creating an university college of the University of Groningen in Leeuwarden, the capital of the province of Fryslan and Cultural Capital of Europe in 2018. There are some skeptical reactions.

But we never give up!