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Up or out? Archetypes and person-organization fit in Dutch law firms

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Preface

In 1989, I entered the world of law firms as a manager at Boekel Van Empel & Drilling (nowadays Boekel De Nerée). With 35 lawyers, the firm ranked among the five biggest in The Netherlands. When I left in 1996, the firm had grown to more than 120 lawyers but had dropped out of the top 10 biggest law firms. In these years, law firm management – including HRM – developed simultaneously with the size of the law profession and of law firms. I was privileged to participate in these developments from the early days on.

From the start, one of the issues that kept attracting my interest was the difference between young lawyers in their development to autonomous professionals. In general, law firms are successful in recruiting talented and ambitious young men and women. Some of them flourish and rise to associate or even partner positions, while others leave after years of toiling. Sometimes, this difference can be attributed to capabilities or personality, but often the causes are unclear. One of the possible explanations might be found in the character of the firm – its culture, organization, support. But how this character affected the chances of different lawyers was unknown and never thoroughly explored. Meanwhile, valuable talent was wasted and years that should have unfolded the potential of young professionals were spoiled. My motivation for the research that resulted in this dissertation originated in these observations. I hope that my research may contribute to improve the choices and success of firms and young professionals.

There might be some truth in the horror stories about Ph.D. projects and writing a thesis while having a full time job, but I found them mostly false. Of course, it is a journey with unexpected turns and setbacks, but these were outweighed by far by the pleasure of discovery and progress. Having a supporting family and work environment helped a lot. I started my research for this thesis in 2008; in the same year I ran my first marathon, in Berlin. As

with a marathon, to complete a Ph.D. thesis you have to keep on running, to keep on track and hope to avoid serious injuries. Contrary to a marathon, you cannot do it without help.

I would like to express my thankfulness to the law firms, their managing partners, HRM directors and the young lawyers that made my research possible through the interviews and responses to the surveys. The Dutch Bar Association supported the project from the beginning. Without the inspiration of working among Dutch lawyers, this project never would have been possible. Incidentally, individual lawyers are exposed in the media as greedy, pompous and/or unreliable. Through the years, I probably have met a few thousand Dutch lawyers. With very few exceptions I have found them intelligent and dependable, committed to the cause of the client and to the ethics of the profession, as well as agreeable and challenging company.

I thank my colleagues at RaymakersvdBruggen for their support and help, especially Marchelle van Bon who spent indispensable time and efforts in analyzing my results and amply compensated my initial lack of statistical know how.

I am very grateful to my supervisors professor Deanne den Hartog and professor Rob van Otterlo for their support and guiding, their sound advices and their confidence. In 2008, professor Jan Wesseling introduced me to dr. Wendelien van Eerde as a possible (co-)supervisor of my thesis project. He could not have done me a bigger favour. Wendelien introduced me in theories, methodologies and scientific communities that were relatively new for me, guided me through or around probable pitfalls and corrected my drafts with tremendous patience and precision. Every discussion we had gave me fresh insights and strengthened my belief that it could be done. Without you, Wendelien, this thesis would have been utterly impossible. Thank you.

Eighty-seven years ago, my grandfather Martinus de Haas successfully upheld his doctoral thesis in the Aula of the University of Amsterdam. He dedicated his dissertation to the memory of his mother. I would like to follow his example in both respects.