Tensions in the Boardroom

A Cultural Perspective on Corporate Governance in the Dutch Financial Sector

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Corporate governance is a term much used in the financial sector, by actors and regulators alike. Public debate places the behavior of corporate executives under scrutiny, and words such as greed and ‘bonus culture’ shape the impression that many have of the sector’s top men and women. But do we know enough of the realities facing those whose workplace is the arena of corporate governance? What does their world look like? This study aims to describe and understand the lifeworld of actors in and around the boards of governance. Tensions in the Boardroom gives examples of work practices in the top tier of the Dutch financial sector. Through a context study and two case studies -of a value-based pension fund and a small sustainable bank- it describes how key players in and around the boards of governance deal with tensions in corporate governance and how these tensions manifest themselves in practice.

Ellen Steijvers (1977, Maarheeze, The Netherlands) received her MA in Social Sciences in 2003 after completing her thesis on the relationship between organizational culture and the binding of high potentials in the Dutch banking sector. After completing her Master’s degree, she was involved in establishing and developing the research department at Inholland University of Applied Sciences. At the research department she acquired extensive work experience. She began as project secretary, then became policy officer (research, Master’s programs and internationalization), managed the operations office, joined the management team, and became a knowledge broker and grants and projects advisor. She combined these jobs with part-time positions in research on corporate governance and in lecturing on corporate governance and qualitative research methodology. Trained as an organizational anthropologist, she recently founded her own company, Senvy (named after her two daughters Evy en Senna), which assists boards of governance and managers in their approach to cultural change so that more economic and social benefits from the organization can be achieved.