

# Heart Intelligence in action

Obstacles & levers

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**RESEARCH  
REPORT**

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# Executive summary



Launched in June 2021 by Heart Leadership University (HLU), "Straight from the Heart" is an executive education program designed to help senior managers develop and put into practice their Heart Intelligence (intuition, empathy, courage) to transform their company.

The participants in the first edition of this course (June 2021 - January 2023) formed the field of study for an action-research program led by Stéphane La Branche of the IPBC. The aim was to define the concept of Heart Intelligence (HI) and associated practices and to evaluate the program by answering the following questions: is it possible to teach and learn HI? To what extent can senior managers transform themselves by developing it and thereby help their companies to evolve? What are the levers and obstacles to this transformation?

The research program was based on a review of the academic literature, surveys, and several waves of semi-structured interviews with participants.

## A DEFINITION OF HEART INTELLIGENCE

Research has enabled us to forge a definition of Heart Intelligence and to better define the aptitudes that underpin Heart Leadership (empathy, intuition, courage).

Applied to business management, Heart Intelligence is about making decisions and leading without focusing solely on economic performance or on what is considered rational and supported by logic and figures. It is cultivated around three fundamentals: trusting our intuition to perceive the world ahead and innovate differently; having the courage to be ourselves, to assume our values and act accordingly; and developing empathy by learning to connect better with others and our environment to create products and services that are useful to the world while empowering our employees. Above all, Heart Intelligence lies in the combination of these three skills. This is particularly evident in the case of courage, without which neither intuition nor empathy could be expressed.

The report points out that each of these skills can be used for different purposes and to the benefit or detriment of a particular person (or entity). In the literature and in the views of senior managers, there are fine distinctions between the skills that are desirable in a leader – which may be purely for performance (financial metrics, expansion) or which may at the same time contribute to a more qualitative performance – and a balanced position of the leader in a harmonious relationship with his or her company and society.

For example, during one interview, a participant said that he wanted to "develop integrated heart/body/spirit leadership with the right balance between my individual aspirations and my contribution to a better world, without betraying who I am."

## THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF HEART INTELLIGENCE

This action-research enabled us to identify whether, and to what extent, the course, through its pedagogical progression (stages and progressive approach of the course) and its specific learning methods (through practice, meetings and exchanges between peers) provided the right conditions and appropriate tools for leaders to transform themselves and their company (in order, in most cases, to take the company in a direction that contributes to the common good).

The small number of leaders, their predominantly humanist value system and their pioneering nature do not allow us to assert that the course as such is a systematically efficient (and reproducible) tool for the profound transformation of a leader and his or her company, but in this sample (the first cohort to complete the course), three key facts can be noted:

1-The course has provided the leaders with a better understanding of themselves (strengths, weaknesses, grey areas, values, skills), enabling them to gain in personal alignment and to have a better, more solid basis for action.

"Self-knowledge for a leader goes beyond simply knowing what we value, what drives our energy and what takes energy away from us. It includes understanding our intuitive mode and that of others, as well as the origins of our emotions."

2-The course has a very 'on-the-ground' aspect which has made it effective in terms of taking real action in a variety of strategic areas (governance, HR, innovation, ethics, environmental transition, performance assessment, etc.). Indeed, research clearly shows that changes in practice are more effectively brought about by active teaching (experimentation, putting into practice): HI cannot be taught in theory but senior managers can be encouraged to practice it and to help each other.

3-The obstacles to action have been identified and, where possible, totally or partially removed. There are internal obstacles specific to the individual manager (certain fears), obstacles specific to the organization (its type of governance and its rigidities, the culture and the established common thinking, resistance from employees), and lastly external obstacles (cyclical or more structural, relating to the vision of the role of a company).

Through a series of meetings, mutual support and in-depth self-examination, the course enabled several participants to dare to act (with greater knowledge and confidence) and to make atypical, out-of-the-ordinary decisions. The participants were able to work on their empathy and their intuition and develop sufficient courage to "dare to be themselves", to dare to act – without being reckless. In addition, they were able to work on the levers and improve the collective dynamics (internal and external) needed to encourage, adopt or accelerate change.

# INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of the exploratory research program "Heart Intelligence in Action: obstacles and levers" led by Stéphane La Branche, an IPBC<sup>1</sup> sociologist, for Heart Leadership University (HLU) from June 2021 to March 2023. It focuses on transforming leaders through Heart Intelligence and putting this into action in their companies.

## A BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Founded by 15 business leaders, Heart Leadership University (HLU) is an educational and scientific non-profit organization. Its mission is to revolutionize the education of leaders, renew the imagination of leadership and encourage the emergence of a movement of leaders who direct, innovate and make decisions from the heart (with intuition, empathy and courage) to preserve our humanity and overcome the challenges of the 21st century<sup>2</sup>.

To implement this mission, HLU has designed the From the Heart to Action executive course (see box), the pilot edition of which ran from June 2021 to January 2023 with a cohort of twelve executives. This first edition also served as a field of study for two action-research programs designed to explore the impact of the course and shed light on the extent to which, by mobilizing their Heart Intelligence, senior managers can transform themselves and thus help their company to evolve.

This report presents the conclusions of the "Heart Intelligence in action: obstacles and levers" program, supervised by Stéphane La Branche, an IPBC sociologist.

The firm Prophil<sup>3</sup> was commissioned to carry out another research-action program entitled "The Power of the Heart" to shed light on the interrelationships between Heart Intelligence and governance and to study the impact of the program on the governance practices of the participating senior managers and on the governance structure of their organizations<sup>4</sup>.

### THE "STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART" COURSE FOR SENIOR MANAGERS

This is an 18-month executive education program designed to develop Heart Intelligence (HI) in managers, giving them the foundations and tools to transform their business. Through eight successive thematic and immersive modules, participants experiment with HI and acquire the tools they need to achieve the individual and organizational transformation objectives they set themselves at the start of the course.

To find out more, visit [our website](#).

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<sup>1</sup> IPBC = International Panel on Behavior Change. See <https://www.ipbc.science/>

<sup>2</sup> Excessive use of artificial intelligence systems, ecological collapse, explosion of inequalities.

<sup>3</sup> More information: <https://prophil.eu/>

<sup>4</sup> See : [The power of the heart, Impact study and reflections on the transformation of corporate governance through heart intelligence](#) - Prophil and Heart Leadership University, 2023



## B FIELD OF STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

The first cohort to complete the "Straight from the Heart" program included twelve managers from ten organizations (nine companies and one association). The organizations represented covered a wide range of sizes and sectors: staff numbers ranging from 1 to 3,000 employees, turnover from € one million to over €600 million, and sectors such as the press, insurance, consultancy, cosmetics, cleaning equipment and construction. These organizations did not all have the same level of maturity. Some had just been set up, while others had been in existence for several decades (in one case for almost 150 years).

As for the managers, they did not all have the same role and degree of power within their company: some chaired their organization and were, in some cases, the majority shareholder, while others were non-shareholder managers (employees or corporate officers). Their room for manoeuvre to transform their company was therefore not the same.

This research focuses on ten of the managers taking part in the course<sup>5</sup>. The methodology was based on a review of the scientific literature on the different dimensions of Heart Intelligence (intuition, empathy, courage), three waves of semi-structured interviews (before, in the middle of, and at the end of the course) and questionnaires which the participants were asked to complete at the end of each module<sup>6</sup>.

## C EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

In line with its mission to foster leadership driven by the heart and in so doing transform the leader and his or her company, HLU also conducts independent, cross-disciplinary research into little-investigated subjects. This research is therefore eminently exploratory in nature.

First, as we shall see, the notion of Heart Intelligence is not the subject of established academic knowledge or even of a consistent definition. Our research therefore first focused on this new concept to define its scope. Secondly, as this was a pilot edition, the participants were particularly motivated and convinced of the value of the course. They were therefore a sample of pioneers who were particularly receptive and proactive with respect to the lessons learned. Lastly, there are few equivalent studies that take an empirical approach to analyzing the effects of such a course during the process. Our aim is therefore not so much to confirm hypotheses as to formulate them and explore possibilities. Nevertheless, we offer conclusions and solutions to some of the challenges and limitations encountered.

After explaining the concept of Heart Intelligence ([part I](#)), based on a review of the scientific literature and the participants' understanding of it, we will address the question of the transformative power of Heart Intelligence: to what extent, by developing their Heart Intelligence, can managers transform themselves ([part II](#)) and their companies ([part III](#))? What are the obstacles and levers to this transformation ([part IV](#))?

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<sup>5</sup> The other two were unable to complete the course for personal reasons.

<sup>6</sup> For more information, see "Field methodology" in the appendix.

# I Definition of Heart Intelligence based on literature and feedback from participants.

Prior to the operational phase, a review of the academic literature was carried out on the factors that come into play in the development of heart-driven leadership. In the texts reviewed, the concept of "Heart Intelligence" is never used. It is therefore not yet the subject of academic knowledge or a standardized definition.

Jean-Noël Thorel, founder of HLU, proposes the following definition: "Heart Intelligence goes beyond the rational. It allows us to connect with others, to function with intuition. Those who make decisions must consider "the other" in the most generic sense, i.e., the environment, nature, animals, and other human beings."

One of the aims of the research was therefore to forge a definition of this concept, both by analyzing what the literature says about the different skills selected by HLU (intuition, empathy, courage) and by enriching this analysis with the understanding that participants in the "Straight from the Heart" program have of HI.

## A CROSS-DISCIPLINE ANALYSES OF THE SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE ON COURSES LIKE THE ONE DEVELOPED BY HLU

To carry out this literature review, we studied around thirty texts (see bibliography) relating, on the one hand, to the analysis of executive career paths or training courses and, on the other hand, to intuition, empathy, and courage, as well as emotional intelligence, a concept widely used in academic articles.

The texts studied on the key aptitudes of Heart Intelligence were mainly drawn from management sciences and psycho-cognitive sciences.

The two disciplines do not share many of their results or methods and tend to focus on different approaches. The psycho-cognitive sciences focus more on the concepts and functioning of the four skills, while management sciences concentrate more on their effects and interactions with business and management. In addition, management sciences have less to say about empathy and courage than about emotions and intuition and place a great deal of emphasis on the question of leadership, particularly in relation to empathy.

Despite these differences in approach, there are a few points on which they converge, which are sufficiently remarkable to warrant highlighting:

- Considering the four components of intuition, courage, emotions and empathy helps to improve governance and management techniques.
- They refute the idea that rationality alone is what counts in decision-making.
- They call into question the supremacy of rationality, both as the driving force behind decision-making and as a criterion for analyzing the internal workings of a company.

While the literature is prolific in terms of theoretical, laboratory and experimental approaches, it is much sparser when it comes to providing analytical tools and empirical evaluation indicators for executive career paths and training.

It identifies few, if any, standardized means of measurement and there is very little feedback from real-life situations and even fewer evaluations of this type of course.

Where such evaluations have been carried out, they often boil down to a few limited criteria that are easy to quantify and objectify but which are ultimately difficult to distinguish from other factors that may also play a role. In other words, it is difficult to exclude certain factors and, conversely, to state that one is more important than the others.

There are several reasons for this situation.

- There is a plethora of in-company training courses but almost all of them remain the property of the trainer, who does not offer any feedback, which makes it impossible to assess the impact or their method. The methods used in the course developed by HLU are, in fact, rare enough to merit special mention.
- The questions asked and the issues addressed in such training courses are very often subject to confidentiality issues, which are necessary to obtain valid answers from the participants. The results are therefore difficult to disseminate.
- Finally, many of the results presented as 'empirical' are in fact based on laboratory experiments! They are far removed from the reality of how things work, the power issues involved, human interactions and corporate cultures.

It is with these limitations in mind that we need to understand the findings of our literature review on the three skills of intuition, courage and empathy and their role and status in the exercise of leadership and company senior management.



## B EMPATHY

In the first wave of interviews, empathy topped the list of HI skills mentioned by participants. This was less the case in subsequent waves, where more space was given to intuition and courage.

The participants demonstrated a very homogeneous vision and practice of empathy (considering the emotions and humanity of others). This was also consistent with the definitions found in the literature. Empathy involves mentally reproducing the state, thoughts and actions of another person by putting oneself in their place (Marcus 1997). It does not imply experiencing the emotions of another but understanding their reality without losing oneself in them. The prerequisite for empathy is self-knowledge, which in turn enables and facilitates self-control (Badea 2010).

The literature on empathy is heavily influenced by the issue of leadership, even more so than for the other two core skills explored in this report. Much of the literature takes a positive, moral view of leadership (it aims to empower<sup>7</sup> people). Few sources offer a neutral vision with no moral aspect.

The participants in the "Straight from the Heart" course fit this trend quite well: the leader does not force but offers a vision and makes people want to follow and adopt this vision. From the interviews, it emerged that a good leader almost always appears to be a moral, ethical and empathetic person. Only two participants mentioned the fact that a leader can also be a tyrant or a narcissistic pervert.

However, some of the literature tends to move away from this normative, moral vision. Holt points out that "Over the past decades, "successful leadership" has often been equated with outrageous or exaggerated (even psychopathic) behavior. This may be attributed to the fact that such figureheads are generally expected to be highly confident, even narcissistic individuals, often displaying a range of telling traits, such as grandiosity, exhibitionism, self-centeredness, and lack of empathy." (Holt, 2017, p.4).

Furthermore, the literature and the participants differ with regard to the purpose of good leadership. Most of the texts reviewed state that a good leader aims to improve performance. Empathy is then presented as a tool to be channeled by the leader to lead the group towards better economic performance, which in the participants' view was too simplistic and the opposite of Heart Intelligence. In this case, it is used for manipulative purposes, as several studies on emotional intelligence have pointed out (see box).

The participants thus disagreed strongly with this conception. While they have a realistic vision of what a business is ("you have to make money and allow people to earn a living", said one participant), the purpose of leadership is also ensuring the well-being of employees, their empowerment and their development as human beings.

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<sup>7</sup> In other words, empowering individuals to take charge of their lives, act, improve their living conditions and well-being and contribute to the community.

The leader also aims to ensure that the company contributes to community life and to increase and improve its social usefulness, a vision expressed more strongly in the last phase of the interviews than in the previous ones. The participants reject any use of emotions for manipulation or to improve their company's performance.

## HEART INTELLIGENCE IS NOT THE SAME THING AS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

While the notion of Heart Intelligence is never used in any of the texts surveyed, the concept of emotional intelligence (EI) is, on the contrary, very common, regardless of the discipline.

For Holt (2017, p.14) and most authors, emotional intelligence includes:

- knowledge of one's own emotions as well as intuitive recognition of the impact of one's actions on others;
- mastery of oneself and one's emotions to achieve positive goals;
- the ability to use emotions to motivate and lead towards a sense of personal achievement (and not performance);
- for this, empathy is fundamental; and lastly,
- the ability to create interpersonal links, which depends on communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, etc.

From this definition, the assumption seems to emerge that emotional intelligence is necessarily positive, which many participants refute by saying that this kind of intelligence is required to be a narcissistic pervert. Some studies in the literature reviewed also show that EI does not rule out attempts at manipulation: positive and negative emotions such as anger, enthusiasm, guilt and remorse can be used by the manager to achieve performance objectives and gain better control of teams (Posthuma, 2012)!

According to the participants, HI rules out this possibility as it implies sincere and benevolent self-knowledge. This is not limited to cognition, but extends to the individual's psychological and emotional functioning, making him or her more empathetic towards others. In the participants' view, this understanding of one's own functioning and emotions enables one to better master them.

## C INTUITION

Surprising as it may seem in a society that emphasizes cognition and scientific rationality, the literature does not question the existence or usefulness of intuition. Intuition is presented as a decision-making mode with its own rules, functioning and factors, a context that refers to complex, quasi-instantaneous, unconscious mental processes based on accumulated experience and not resorting to analytical thinking (Ethier, 2014).

*(...) empirical research has shown that intuition is often mobilised and performs well in situations involving high time pressure, few precedents or high levels of uncertainty. The use of this decision-making mode has been reported to be positively correlated with organizational performance in an unstable environment. (Our translation, Bertolucci and Pinzon, 2015, p.116).*

This raises several issues.

Firstly, intuition is not necessarily opposed to rationality when it comes to decision-making. This view was also expressed by the participants: although they don't all use it in the same areas of professional life, intuition seems to them to be just as legitimate a decision-making mechanism as rationality.

Then there's another paradox: if intuition is based on experience, how can it be used in contexts with "few precedents", and therefore of which there is little or no experience? Is an individual's general life experience – not specific to problem 'X' – sufficient in each situation? Or do different elements combine in a situation reminiscent of a past one? The literature doesn't settle this question.

Lastly, some of the texts reviewed note that the use of intuition in decision-making increases with hierarchical position, making it a factor in professional success. However, the institutional context plays an important role: governance norms and their implementation by the manager or leader promote or inhibit the use of intuition in decision-making processes by employees (McCutcheon and Pincombe, 2001, p.119). This explains the importance attached to governance in the HLU approach. Allowing and expressing the use of intuition could be hindered or encouraged by different types of governance and management styles.

As participants in all three waves of interviews emphasized, it is difficult to claim that a "decision was made intuitively", as this would appear insufficient as a means of justifying a risky budget or strategic decision. This is why, in the second wave of interviews, participants often associated intuition with courage: the courage to express and follow one's intuitions, to take decisions that may shake up themselves and their colleagues.

## D COURAGE

Sekerka and Bagozzi define moral courage as "the ability to use inner principles to do what is good for others, regardless of threat to self, as a matter of practice. We believe that this involves the conscious reflection on one desire to act, or the lack of such a desire thereof, as one moves towards engagement. We argue that how a person goes about resolving the conflicts between their desires and personal standards is what ultimately leads to a decision to engage in morally courageous behaviour." (Sekerka and Bagozzi, 2007, p.135)

Courage was mentioned by most participants right from the start, but they returned to this quality more in the second and third waves of interviews, often insisting that it was essential. The word 'courage' itself is not always used, but the idea appeared repeatedly in expressions such as "daring to trust your teams" or "daring to show your emotions", as well as "daring to act on your intuitions". In fact, courage is a skill that enables us to act and express ourselves.

Showing empathy, justifying and communicating your intuitions, but more generically trying to govern a company from the heart sometimes requires courage. Why? Because it often means overturning social norms and practices that are dominant or considered normal. The act of courage is in part determined by this anti-conformist positioning, which can go as far as challenging a social identity (Sekerka and Bagozzi, 2007, p.144). One of the participants who emphasized this point the most put it this way: "It's difficult to express HI in our society because it's not really accepted. It takes courage, especially in our competitive economic world." We will come back to this later (see part IV.C).

## E OUR DEFINITION OF HEART INTELLIGENCE

Heart Intelligence enables us to make decisions and run a company without focusing solely on economic performance and without limiting ourselves to what is considered rational, argued by logic and figures.

It is cultivated around three fundamentals: trusting one's intuition to perceive the world ahead and innovate differently; having the courage to be oneself, to assume one's values and act accordingly; and developing empathy by learning to better connect with others and one's environment to create products and services that are useful to the world while empowering employees.

Above all, Heart Intelligence lies in the (complex) combination of these three skills and even more so in its implementation. This is particularly evident in the case of courage, without which neither intuition nor empathy could be expressed. As we'll see in the next section, self-knowledge is a prerequisite for the expression of HI.

In the next two parts, we address the question of the transformative power of Heart Intelligence, distinguishing between:

- matters concerning the personal transformation of the leader and his or her relationship with others and the world (part II): paying more attention to intuition to make decisions and innovate differently, changing relationships with employees, no longer allowing oneself to be "consumed" by the ego, embodying a different type of leadership, etc.;
- decisions or actions taken by the executive with a transformative impact on the company (part III): structural changes in governance, the product and service offering, sharing of created value (financial indicators), implementation of an ethical process, etc.

This distinction also emerges from the expectations expressed by participants at the start of the course. In the first wave of interviews and the first questionnaire, although they did not give exactly the same reasons as to why they wanted to take part in the course, the answers they gave were never contradictory and mainly referred to the desire to improve oneself to have an operational impact on the company and its employees, and even beyond.

As one participant put it: "to develop integrative heart/body/mind leadership with the right balance between my individual aspirations and my contribution to a better world, without betraying who I am."

## II Heart Intelligence and personal transformation of the leader

In this section, we focus on the personal transformation of the executive. Can Heart Intelligence be taught and learned in a formal setting? To what extent has the course had a transformative effect on participants? What form did it take and how did it manifest itself? These questions imply others relating to the criteria for what constitutes transformation (a subject to which we return in the research avenues in the conclusion).

Even before beginning the first module, HI was already a subject of great interest to the participants, not always in a conscious or theorized way but often through efforts to apply it to varying degrees and in different sectors. Although they didn't all start from the same level (some were already well on the way, others had just begun), from the outset of the course they showed a high degree of homogeneity in their convictions and their desire for transformation. Their participation in the "Straight from the Heart" course was no accident but a logical continuation of a personal journey of action and reflection on the place, role, and identity of a company in our society.

## A CAN HEART INTELLIGENCE BE TAUGHT IN A FORMAL FRAMEWORK?

With the launch of the "Straight from the Heart" course, HLU was taking a chance on the fact that it was possible to learn and therefore teach empathy, courage and intuition. But is it, and if so, how?

The academic literature on this subject is very sparse. The few empirical approaches identified in our review tested hypotheses in the laboratory or in settings too far removed from the course developed by HLU for the results to be useful. The literature tends to postulate rather than demonstrate that intuition, empathy and courage have effects on the way a leader conducts his or her business, but few offer empirical data on actions or on attitudes and understandings of HI and its components within the company.

Sekerka et al. explain: "from experiential-learning theory, we know that for adults to truly learn something (and be able to understand and apply the capability in daily action) they need to (have...) a concrete experience, reflecting on that experience, conceptualizing abstractly about the experience and actively experimenting with new behaviours". (Sekerka et al, 2007, p.63)

This implies that the transmission of pure knowledge is not enough (which is confirmed by all our research on changes in behavior relating to the ecological transition). This is therefore a teaching approach based on doing, not just on thinking. Knowing more about HI is not enough to learn how to apply an ethic or to cultivate the courage to do so; one must practice.

This is confirmed by the findings of this research and feedback from participants. For example, it is not so much a question of acquiring knowledge about intuition as learning to recognize it when it arises, to listen to it, and finally to express it and act on it. These last two conditions depend in turn on I) improving self-confidence, which in turn requires II) better self-knowledge, which as we shall see is one of the major contributions of the course.



## B DEVELOPING HEART INTELLIGENCE IS NOT SO MUCH A MATTER OF COGNITION AS OF PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

As noted in the introduction, when beginning the course, HI was already an important subject to the participants. Although at the outset they said that they wanted to formalize and methodize what they were already doing, this did not appear to be important later because for them, cognitive knowledge was less important than a felt, holistic understanding of what HI was all about.

"The non-reason is more hidden, but it's the driving force! Empathy, intuition, emotions, even love of living things and of our fellow man."

This view was also expressed by another participant: "It's not better knowledge that's important, it's the fact that I'm allowing myself to experience it: it's a journey of personal transformation, not just a cognitive one!"

Thus, we did not observe a strong improvement in their conceptual understanding of HI, but their inner world, their emotions, and their knowledge of themselves were strongly impacted over the 18 months of the program. Regarding the various skills, while empathy was the one most spontaneously associated with HI during the first wave of interviews, the fact of recognizing and listening to one's intuition and the need for courage then took on greater importance in participants' comments, testifying to a better perception of these dimensions. Finally, in the last wave of interviews, self-confidence emerged as a major component of HI. It was associated with I) better self-knowledge and II) better alignment, two major impacts of the course.

## C BETTER ALIGNMENT AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE: TWO KEY IMPACTS OF THE JOURNEY

Self-knowledge, working on oneself, reconciling with one's childhood and taking a sincere look at oneself came up regularly in the discussions.

"Self-knowledge for a leader goes beyond simply knowing your values, your energy drivers and what, conversely, takes energy away from you. It includes understanding our intuitive mode and that of others, as well as the origins of our emotions. As far as I'm concerned, it's above all exercising my intuition that can complement my leadership style."

During the discussions, better self-knowledge emerged as a prerequisite for mobilization, empathy, intuition, and courage. This idea came up more strongly in the second wave of interviews than in the first, and even more strongly in the third, where it appeared to be the key to courage, self-confidence and therefore the ability to act.

Self-knowledge enables us to be aligned, a notion that also came up a lot in the participants' comments, especially in the third wave of interviews; but to be aligned with what?

The answers varied and were not always formalized, but the term refers to a common idea: "being in tune with yourself"; "being in tune with who you are"; "acting according to your own values" (which are always implicitly – and sometimes explicitly – based on benevolence and the desire to "empower" employees, i.e. "enhance their potential"). It's also about being in line with the self and the other; between their actions and their values; establishing congruence between their ethics, knowledge, emotions, intuitions, attitudes and actions. One participant was explicit: after 4 modules, "I understand HI much better than before and I feel that it has transformed me," and this enabled him to become "a much better leader than I was 8 months ago." But in using the word "understand", he is not limiting himself to the cognitive; he is talking about a holistic, personal understanding, both emotional and psychological.

The modules and, above all, the exchanges between participants played a key role in achieving this, by boosting their self-confidence, courage and feeling that they were on the right track. Sharing and interacting with other participants encouraged them to go further than initially envisaged and to do so more quickly. The course "reinforces and gives legitimacy to the action; you're not alone, you're better aligned, it reinforces the idea that this is where you need to go." Another goes further: "it's an in-depth encounter with oneself, which has influenced the way I interact with employees."

"Being aligned" therefore has two meanings: 1 / INSIDE: between your values, ethics, and intuition, and then, 2 / OUTSIDE: between this inner world and the outside world, through actions and words.

So, in the participants' view, while it is important to be better equipped and to have a better understanding (cognitive aspect), the essential element lies elsewhere: it is a question of being aligned with oneself and having a better knowledge of oneself. They all say, and we can see it in their speeches and in the way they analyze their personal journey within the HLU program, that they "have a better basis on which to act." Self-knowledge therefore appears to be a major component of HI (scarcely mentioned in the literature and not mentioned in the first wave of interviews). It is the foundation on which the three HI skills are explored, evaluated, and implemented.

## **D WHAT IS THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT OF THE "STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART" COURSE?**

The foregoing points shed light on one of the questions at the heart of our research: did the course have a transformative impact on the managers?

In fact, transforming oneself does not necessarily imply a break with the past or a metamorphosis. For the participants, it rather means a significant change in their inner alignment and with their actions. For them, and they say so explicitly, the journey is transformative firstly at a personal level and then in the company (see part III). So, a transformation can also be gradual and is not necessarily total, i.e., the changes are not present in all sectors at the same time. It is then necessary to define the degree of change that is perceived as necessary to qualify it as "transformative".

In terms of HI, for example, some participants mentioned a psycho-emotional transformation. Those who initially tended to feel anger, fear or a desire for revenge as the driving force behind their actions moved instead towards love, joy, desire, a search for inner balance, and authenticity. They also shifted from the need for control to the dispossession of money, of course, but also of power and the desire for growth: "Why not stop growing in service and go deeper in coring (more in-depth effects within a smaller area)? To be more qualitative, less superficial; to grow differently!"

To conclude on this question, one participant gave a subtle but important answer: "HLU transforms what is already present, in gestation but not always expressed. [HLU] is not creative, but it is transformative!" This corresponds to our analysis that HI was a topic of importance to the participants before they entered the program, but that they came out of it changed and strengthened.

For several participants, this inner, personal and subjective transformation is the basis for change within the company. It is because they are better aligned that they can act on their organization. This concerns both internal questions and their relationship with their employees. The participants all conclude that becoming better aligned with themselves leads them to seek, or even create, alignment with others and their actions, their mode of governance. It's as if the misalignment between their inner world and their work environment was becoming less acceptable, a challenge to be overcome. On the other hand, there are repercussions outside the company (new suppliers or new demands on existing suppliers; rejection by customers; creation of new forms of action). This is what we'll see in the next section.

## III Taking action: from transforming the leader to transforming the company

The participants share the same vision of the company: it must have a broader purpose than simply the pursuit of profit and must "contribute" to society. This is how one of them expressed his desire "to have a company that works for people and the environment" and that goes beyond "the idea that a company is just a profit-making machine". For all that, they are aware of the need for their organization to be profitable. "I don't think that running a business from the heart means being carefree. We've chosen a role, we're in an economic context, we're not working for an NGO. You must just ensure that the whole ecosystem moves forward with the feeling of a win-win exchange. You must take account of capital as well as the environment, and so on. We mustn't sacrifice one for the other but take the whole into account."

In their view, it goes without saying that managers can make decisions from the heart and that HI can be mobilized in all areas of a company's activities, including "when it's time to make a decision or take a tough decision," particularly when faced with a complex problem or a decision with significant budgetary or human impacts, even in the case of redundancies. All the participants were of the view that the personal

transformation of the manager appears to be a prerequisite for acting in his or her company. It is these actions that we propose to describe in this section.

## A GOVERNING FROM THE HEART: ACTING AT THE HEART OF POWER

The second action-research program, for which Prophil was commissioned by HLU, focused on the specific subject of governance. Here are some of the main conclusions<sup>8</sup>, supplemented where appropriate by the comments we received.

The question of governance refers to the distribution of powers to guide the company, i.e. to take and control "the decisions that have a decisive effect on its permanence and therefore its sustainable performance"<sup>9</sup>. Governance lies at the confluence between the legal framework<sup>10</sup>, the rules defined within the company<sup>11</sup> and more informal practices, "i.e the behaviors, ways of doing things of the governance players and the power relationships or personal interactions they have with each other." This refers to the "cultural" dimension of the organization (set of values, implicit norms, dynamics of interactions, informal processes, etc.) and to the impact of the human factor in corporate governance, directly linked to the ethics of managers. There is also the issue of sharing the value generated by the company and the question of conflicts.

The course enabled participants to become aware of the strategic dimension of governance and the leverage it represents for transforming their company. They were able to see the extent to which governance goes to the very heart of how a company operates and how power and value are shared. They were also able to appreciate the extent of their role: an individual impulse systematically precedes a change in governance, which very often leads to a break with the established rules (whether they are formalized or not). The structure most often evolves at a later stage, to validate and anchor the changes made by individuals. Participants all stressed that governance is a very complex area to change and one that takes time. But they also all emphasized the individual dimension of governance when it is supervised, or even embodied, by a leader wishing to implement governance directed by the heart.

Participants who are founders (and/or majority shareholders) of their company were able to share and develop their thoughts on the question of dispossession, a particularly important issue in the handover phase. This issue goes beyond the financial dimension (divesting oneself of the company's capital): it encompasses intangible value, power sharing, the continuity of governance practices after the founder's departure, the transmission of a vision and a system of values, etc.

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<sup>8</sup> See: [The power of the heart, Impact study and reflections on the transformation of corporate governance through heart intelligence](#) - Prophil and Heart Leadership University, 2023.

<sup>9</sup> This citation and the next one are from Gomez, P. (2018). Corporate governance. Presses Universitaires de France. Paris. Our translation. Note that the author uses the term "sustainable" with a view to longevity but does not deal here with the implications for the company's "sustainable development" policy.

<sup>10</sup> The legal form of the company, any qualifications, or approvals it may have (Entreprise Solidaire d'Utilité Sociale, mission-driven company) and regulatory obligations related to its field of activity or size.

<sup>11</sup> Whether at the company's creation or throughout its life (articles of association and shareholder agreements, internal regulations, charter of commitments, code of ethics).

One of the managers turned down a takeover offer for her company because the potential buyers did not seem to her to be aligned with her company's values and culture. Other senior managers turned down contracts.

These discussions and the tools presented on the course triggered or accelerated action on power and/or value sharing, whether through changes to the articles of association or in their practices.

Some have been able to turn drawing-board ideas into reality. For example, two companies have launched or completed the process of adopting the status of mission-driven company. Another participant explained, "I'm in the process of setting up an endowment fund." She had already had this idea before the course, but also had doubts about its implementation. "There were a lot of discussions that kept putting the project off until later." Yet another wanted to experiment with two types of value sharing: I) shares for all employees and II) employee profit-sharing with thresholds above certain levels of profit. Another wanted to retire from her position as a decision-maker "without abandoning ship," but before doing so she needed to clarify things about the shareholder foundation, the operation and impact of which were not fully understood.

Still others have taken measures initiated before the course a step further (two companies have already set up a shareholder foundation). "I'm going to separate the roles of CEO and Chairman and review the composition of my Boards (Foundation and Consultancy). And I'm going to continue sharing the wealth: setting up a free share plan, opening the group's capital via the employee shareholding fund every year, increasing the shareholding of the shareholder foundation," so that it becomes the majority shareholder.

Lastly, in their governance practices, participants are tending towards greater horizontality, which refers to the notion of sharing decision-making power (less top-down and directive hierarchies, greater empowerment of managers and employees). This subject is regularly raised by participants, who see it both as an ideal to strive for and as a process for learning and improving the working environment. However, when they compare this ideal with human reality, it appears to be neither entirely practicable nor even entirely desirable.

On the one hand, it is important to stay the course, retain the vision. As one participant put it, we need to "think about the form of governance to be created, which will enable us to be horizontal while ensuring that the strategy is climate-compatible, that it brings together motivation, financial capacity and decision-making capacity." For the participants, Heart Intelligence also means knowing when and how to supervise employees who do not want to have too much autonomy or who are anxious about the idea. HI, through mobilization of empathy and knowledge of oneself and others, means recognizing that "we don't all function in the same way. Leaders and good managers need to adapt. They must help their staff to become more capable and autonomous, and if their staff don't want that autonomy, then they must be more directive. You have to be smart about it." Empathy (and for some, intuition) plays a key role in interpersonal relationships and in detecting how employees are feeling and whether they need more or less supervision.

## B ACTING BETTER TOGETHER: DEVELOPING A "COLLECTIVE HEART"

As the participants explained, the leader's primary role is to provide a vision that must carry the teams with it. This vision must therefore be understood, adopted, and translated into practice by managers and employees.

The ensuing mutual trust in turn requires the leader to let go of his or her decision-making power: "Control is the death of trust. It's a total letting go. It's very frightening at first, but afterwards the returns are incomparable." The question of courage emerges here, but also, and more fundamentally, the issue of emotions, the personal qualities of the HI in collective actions and the "*ability to mobilize the troops*".

During the course, participants were able to discuss the importance of mobilizing the collective, which is as much a lever as an obstacle to transforming their company. The lack of an HI culture can lead to power struggles and ego wars within organizations and fuel conflicts between divergent individual value systems, whatever the formal governance framework. The participants worked on the role of the leader, group dynamics and the tools they can use to improve them. Understanding the different value systems that drive a company's employees appeared to be an important point in knowing how to convey the leader's vision.

### GROUP DYNAMICS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Group dynamics is a field of research in psychology and sociology that focuses on the life and functioning of small groups of individuals which are the result of human behavior and multiple evolutionary forces, both individual and collective. The American psycho-sociologist Bruce Tuckman has proposed a model to characterize the phases in the development of a group in which the leader has a particular role: constitution (the leader must establish a climate of trust), turbulence (the leader must encourage constructive dialogue), normalization (the leader must stimulate collective intelligence), performance (the leader must give responsibility and maintain the dynamic) and finally dissolution, because no group is eternal (the leader must accompany change, including stepping back and even dispossessing himself).

Extract from *The Power of the Heart* report, Prophil and Heart Leadership University, 2023.



Most of the participants said that they had taken heart-led human resources and management decisions before the course. In their view, decision-making in these areas is easier because actions can be taken in the short term, on specific issues and for specific teams. They are also easy to define and propose and can deliver results more quickly.

- Recruitment and internal mobility policy is a key area of application with the mobilization of empathy and intuition. However, three participants admitted that their empathy was sometimes too great and that they could therefore make the wrong decisions. In such cases, they either decided not to sit on the hiring committees or they made the decision collectively with others.
- All the people interviewed said that HI helps employees to develop their personal and 'human' skills (and not just their professional skills). The aim is to develop a corporate culture based on Heart Intelligence. Many of the initiatives take the form of training courses for employees in collective intelligence tools, non-violent communication, co-development and individual coaching, particularly for immediate subordinates (on Heart Intelligence or on certain key areas of application such as accounting, environmental and CSR practices, etc.). Other tools presented on the course were also used, such as "the creation of a new appraisal interview model based on success, optimization and emotion management, while walking!"

Module 6 was devoted to mobilizing the collective, both within and outside the company. The participants reported that they had implemented actions along these lines:

- "Coaching for immediate subordinates, Heart Intelligence training for managers; extended the collective decision-making process beyond specific projects".
- Several participants dwelt on the right to make mistakes within their teams.
- "A better understanding of the dynamics at work within my department (accepting brainstorming, supporting the collective movement required, understanding the interactions that exist between the players in my department) and within the Executive Committee. For the Executive Committee, this module highlighted the shortcomings (lack of connections, undefined boundaries) and the extent to which this was trickling down to the rest of the company".
- "Organization of working meetings and sharing of 'Smart group' project initiatives, including internal players, partners, service providers and even customers."

## C CREATING AND INNOVATING FROM THE HEART: RECONCILING ETHICS AND BUSINESS

During the course, participants were able to discuss the concept of ethics and how to translate this into operational terms within their company. This takes the form of internal actions within the company, such as brainstorming and formalizing the mission and values of their organization as a group, drawing up an ethics charter with employees, redesigning products and launching new offers.

It also involves questioning and adopting new practices in their relationships with stakeholders outside the company. The participants have a broad, multi-sector and multi-actor vision of their efforts to imbue their company with HI. They realize that part of their offering and their impact depends on their suppliers, but also on their customers. Between the three waves of interviews, there was a clear evolution in relationships with suppliers and customers, with more efforts and actions implemented in the second half of the journey than in the first.

As far as external players are concerned, the participants mentioned the imposition of new conditions on suppliers and customers, or even the rejection of customers deemed to be too far removed from the senior management's values.

For example, their efforts in terms of ecology in their interactions with their customers and suppliers:

- "Reviewing my offerings so that I can have a dialogue with my customers about the environmental impact of managing their data."
- "A service offering directly linked to the ecological transition."
- "Relying on a healthy ecosystem with a love of life, since our core business (cars and insurance) is by nature less so."
- One person said that she "can't do too much about suppliers, and our ethical agreement is fairly well respected." But she retains the freedom to reject customers who want to negotiate too much or tick CSR boxes without backing them up with action. In such cases, she refuses to negotiate and will tackle them head-on (including for large contracts).
- Consideration of a new, more ethical alternative offer (relocation of some production to France). Has stopped some advertising (e.g. on Arctic cruises), which represents a loss of income.
- Trained employees and some customers on the climate map and on their individual carbon footprint.

Some of the actions are significant and give priority to the living world rather than to profitability alone. The participants have therefore not limited themselves to trying to mobilize only their teams, but also their customers and suppliers. This also reflects a certain vision of the role of the company, already noted in the introduction: it is not limited to providing jobs and generating profits, or even to producing goods and services. A company is a contributor to society in the full sense of the term.

## D COUNTING WHAT REALLY COUNTS

The course raised the question of reference frameworks for assessing the value created by the company: is it limited to its economic and financial impacts, or does this also include its human and environmental impacts? Two participants began to think about implementing triple bottom line accounting.

Following on from Module 7, "Developing reference frameworks to assess created value", participants reported on several important actions:

- "This year, I integrated 3K accounting into the company's business plan and made sure that Finance was the referral team for carbon footprint and social impact calculations. Through the module and through my 3K accounting experience this year, I understood some essential elements: distrusting figures, maintaining a critical stance, countering the "give back", the cognitive biases of shareholders, the need for method and objectives, interaction with the mission-led business course."
- "Implementation of Universal Accounting, a vision of extra-financial performance to help make the right strategic decisions."

Furthermore, half of the participants said they used HI in matters relating to budgeting "because budgeting is also about people."

They differ in their use of intuition in this area: some use it, others would like to learn how to use it better, and for others, budgeting is a question of rationality. This shows the ambiguity of the role of intuition in possible areas of action, an ambiguity not found with other skills. However, the literature and the participants' comments clearly show that rationality and intuition are two different – but equally valid and complementary – modes of decision-making.

## E LOVE OF THE LIVING WORLD: THE ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION OF THE COMPANY

We have already mentioned some of the actions in favor of the living world taken by senior managers in relation to their customers and suppliers, but we would like to expand on a few points here.

The first is that the "Straight from the Heart" approach stands out in a very significant way from most of the awareness-raising and training approaches to climate, energy, and biodiversity. The latter are almost all fear-based: they tell us that if we do nothing, there will be a crisis with impacts on our agricultural production, natural disasters, our quality of life and our freedom. These discourses are also strongly based on cognitive and rational data derived from scientific studies. Yet, behavioral science shows that the use of fear to change practices in the ecological transition is highly ambiguous at best and counterproductive at worst. Instead, HLU has opted for a strategy of love for living things. Rather than trying to get participants to act to escape a coming crisis, the aim is to get them to act for the living planet, for its benefit. Using "taking care" as a driving force for action.

The second point relates to the terms used. Although the HLU program does not mention the expression Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), participants do make use of this notion, but with several ambiguities.

The first of these lies in its definition: some talk about their efforts to improve their ecological footprint in a general way, while others have a more formalistic conception of it, i.e. following specifications to obtain certification, for example. In this case, they see a structured, well-identified method (identifiable by the players in their ecosystem) as helping them along this path.

The second ambiguity concerns its status. For some, CSR is limited to specific practices (waste sorting, reducing heating). For others, it can also lead to more far-reaching changes in the choice of suppliers, the development of "green" product and service offerings for customers or the adoption of ambitious new objectives that can lead to changes in corporate identity. It can also mean turning customers away. So, depending on the action taken, CSR can be an area for exploring new sector-specific actions, but it can also lead to new forms of governance.

Throughout the course, and despite comments about the inadequacy of their actions, participants talked about numerous actions in favor of the living world, aimed at training their employees but also at informing their corporate strategy:

- Creating a climate map.
- Individual carbon assessment.
- Training in eco-design in services.
- Training in perma-enterprise.
- Improved CSR, particularly in terms of workplace actions but also in relationships with customers and their products.
- Systematic consideration of the ecological footprint for every decision.
- Submission of a CSR case and a much-improved balance sheet, rewarded by real improvement and a better rendering of what has been done over the past ten years. Efforts on the content of its publications. In-house training to reduce the ecological footprint of digital technology.
- Implementation of a strategic ESG plan to address environmental impacts that are less at the forefront of concerns.
- Inspired by the "principles of permaculture", which resonate with her professional culture and principles of action; has begun to share this with her senior management colleagues and project coaches with a view to preparing/projecting towards a systemic change in their actions.

- CSR as an integral part of the company's project and with its suppliers and customers. Co-constructed and voted with and by employees, and with ISO 26000. The profile of their company in 2030 showed ecology to be the most important element. Involved in a scope 3 carbon assessment with eco-design of its structure and customers and suppliers with a responsible purchasing policy. Implementation of tools and criteria in the company's CSR strategy to enable employees to do their jobs and sort construction waste correctly.
- Creation of a CSR department a year previously with an approach designed to try and resolve dilemmas (e.g.: a cheaper product with a higher carbon footprint; both aspects are quantified, which has budgetary impacts).
- Adoption of a code of ethics.
- A strategic impetus for the company: allocating resources to make our methods, offer and procurement viable and sustainable.

Efforts to take the environment into account have not been made with the same ambition or degree of implementation by all participants. We can categorize these into three groups, each representing around a third of the participants:

- those who say they don't know too much about the subject, who would like to do more but don't really know how to;
- those who say they don't really know what to do but then cite many examples of action, but feel that this is not enough. Sociologically, this is characteristic of people with a high level of knowledge of ecological issues but who feel that their actions are not up to the challenge. These first two groups are looking for action and concrete suggestions from the course;
- Lastly, there are those who are proud of what they have achieved. They have embarked on ambitious initiatives and are tackling several practices within their company. For some, this is even their core business.

Although ecology was initially the poor relation in most of the participants' reflections, the course had a real influence. As the course progressed, they showed a greater appetite for going beyond simple individual actions towards efforts to develop a strategy integrated into their operations, including resource allocation, budgeting and their customers and suppliers.

## IV What are the obstacles to the expression of Heart Intelligence and its implementation?

The aim of our research was also to highlight the obstacles that participants may have encountered and the ways in which these were overcome or not. Three main categories of obstacles were identified implicitly and explicitly in the interviews.

### A THE LEADER'S INTERNAL OBSTACLES

- Internal obstacles are linked to the participants' own limitations and in particular their fears.

This was why so many of them cited as key results of the course an improvement in their self-confidence and a reinforcement of their intuition and courage to take appropriate action. "Daring to listen to and express one's intuition" is one of the fears regularly mentioned in interviews and one that the course helps to overcome.

Internal obstacles also include the feeling of not doing enough or not doing it fast enough, which can lead to dissatisfaction and discouragement. This is very common in all organizations (local authorities, associations, etc.) that are making efforts to innovate.

The question of power-sharing also raises internal obstacles, whether in terms of moving towards more horizontal governance or when matters of dispossession of their business are addressed by the founding. This subject raises questions about oneself and one's place in the company as a senior manager. What is the role and status of a senior manager in this type of governance? How does one give employees greater autonomy while continuing to drive the company's vision and possibly having to make difficult decisions? How does one gradually relinquish control of the company, whether in financial terms<sup>12</sup> or in terms of power? What are the consequences of this for the company?

On this subject too, obstacles arise from emotions including fear, which takes several forms. The first is that many of the participating senior managers are emotionally attached to the company they have created and are therefore also afraid that it will turn into a conventional company and that the efforts they have made to imbue it with HI principles will be in vain. The second is the fear that wrong decisions will be made for the company and its employees.

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<sup>12</sup> For instance, donating all or part of one's shares to a shareholder foundation.



- The importance of peer-to-peer discussion and of taking action

The "Straight from the Heart" course has enabled participants to become aware of these personal obstacles and to give voice to their fears and expectations.

Above all, the fact that they were able to get together during the modules, discuss ideas and meet other senior managers on site visits strongly encouraged them to continue their chosen path and to overcome their fears. The sharing and interaction between peers encouraged them to go further and faster than they initially envisaged. The course *"reinforces and gives legitimacy to the action; you're not alone, you're better aligned, it reinforces the idea that this is the way you need to go."*

The desire to experience the course alongside others expressed in the first wave of interviews was strengthened by the respect participants developed for each other. This is perhaps even the strength and main attraction of the course. The participants spoke about it with great emotion, even admiration for the valuable and varied contributions made by participants and the personal bonds forged. All the participants said that it was the exchanges between themselves and with the speakers that brought them the most in human, conceptual and pragmatic terms.

As we saw in part II, for the participants, founding corporate change lies in the inner, personal and subjective transformation of the leader. It is because they are better aligned that they can take action on the company. Here, we would like to raise another complementary hypothesis: taking action, strongly encouraged and supervised by the course, has positive effects on courage and self-confidence, which in turn provide a more solid foundation for further action in new and more ambitious areas. This is not unique to the "Straight from the Heart" program and has been noted in populations and institutions such as local authorities that are beginning to commit to lessening their daily ecological impact. The more they act, the easier it is for them to tackle more risky and complex issues. This is a more general psycho-cognitive process, which in the context of the course translates into alignment with oneself.

In this way, peer-to-peer sharing and taking action during the course creates the conditions for transformation through a mirror effect that echoes some of the key ideas of social commitment theory.

## SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT THEORY: "YOUR THOUGHTS FLOW FROM YOUR ACTIONS"

Social engagement theory was developed by Kiesler (1971)<sup>13</sup>, for whom human beings act according to what they have already done and not human beings act according to what they have already done, and not necessarily according to what they think or know. In many social science theories and empirical methods, the opposite is often postulated: "your actions flow from your thoughts." The common belief is that our actions follow automatically from our thoughts and values. This implies that we can analyze these behaviors based on the declarative.

Social engagement theory reverses this belief, postulating the opposite: "I think what I do," with cognition stemming from actions. Of course, the relationship between behavior and thought is not unidirectional. It is strongly influenced, for example, by emotions or context. For most people, the intention, desire, and rational decision to cycle have much more to do with urban planning, roads and the fear of accidents than with environmental values.

The aspect of Kiesler's theory that interests us here is the social dimension of commitment. To put it simply: when we decide individually, we have a greater chance of failing to act on it than if we make it and express it publicly, in front of our peers. The more significant the group is for the individual making the decision, the more likely it is to be translated into action and maintained over time.

The implications for the path developed by HLU are obvious: a manager who promises to implement an action in front of the other participants is more likely to act on it than one who does not. If he expresses this decision in front of his colleagues in his company, then implementation will be even stronger and more likely.

## B INTERNAL OBSTACLES WITHIN THE COMPANY

As one participant noted, "Changing oneself quickly reaches a limit if the working environment is not changed. It becomes impossible to convince people that the effort it takes to transition our businesses is costly and that it must be understood and accepted by suppliers and customers. And to achieve this, we need to go up the hierarchy, which can make decisions and change conditions. It's about changing the model, which brings us back to the same difficulty as trying to change corporate governance rather than certain behaviors."

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<sup>e</sup> C.A. Kiesler, *The Psychology of Commitment*, Academic Press, New York, 1971.

- **Corporate governance structure**

When managers set out to transform their company, they may come into conflict with existing governance structures. This is not surprising as numerous political science and organizational sociology articles have raised and analyzed this obstacle, which has been noted, to a greater or lesser extent, in all institutions, whether private or public, SMEs or multinationals. For example, forms of governance that result in a profit-maximizing organization for shareholders are a major hindrance to the expression of the leader's Heart Intelligence. In large companies and institutions, sector-based silos are a significant obstacle to efforts to achieve transition, which require a cross-functional, multi-sector approach.

As noted in part III, most participants have embarked on processes aimed at transforming their company's governance. They all emphasize that this takes time, more than the 18 months of the course, and also requires tools, discussion and even specific support to resolve the operational difficulties encountered.

### **PATH DEPENDENCY AND INSTITUTIONAL FIT**

Developed by Pierson (2000), the notion of path dependency is based on the observation that every decision-making process is affected by the choices made at the outset, some of which are decisive in the long term and cause a cumulative process of reinforcement: the further we go, the more difficult it is to change path and the fewer structural, political, economic, social and conceptual alternatives there are. For example, every decision taken within the framework of a carbon-based society limits the possibilities of developing a post-carbon society.

According to Young (2002), an institution's environmental efforts can be impeded by the problem of matching its objectives in this area with its internal structure (what he calls institutional fit). In other words, efforts to improve the climate or to reduce energy consumption can be thwarted by bureaucracy, habits and an institutional culture, regardless of the organization's 'ecological' intentions. Young points out that the natural stickiness of institutions may require a change in the way they operate and a change in their identity if they are to contribute to the fight against climate change, for example. We have also noted rigidity of accounting, the lack of in-house expertise, contracts and loyalty relationships with suppliers and customers, regulations, and the lack of a cross-functional approach to responding adequately to ecological issues.

- **The work team: senior management and employees**

The reaction of employees at all levels is one of the major obstacles that emerged from the discussions in the second and third waves of interviews. This is particularly true of managers, since it is they who are responsible for putting into practice the vision put forward by the leader (a view shared by all participants).

While all the participants reported that their employees were genuinely curious about what they were learning on the course, they also all said that they had reservations when it came to taking action. These fears were of various kinds: fear of the company possibly going out of business; anxiety about taking on too much responsibility; fear of making mistakes; anxiety about the uncertainties associated with changes in culture, processes, offerings, and more.

Our various analyses of the difficulties of bringing about change suggest two general sources of resistance.

- The first is the clash between different visions of what constitutes "good" management and "good" governance, with unconscious expectations about everyone's place, responsibilities, power and decision-making. This has more to do with representations of the corporate world, how it works and its *raison d'être* than with a conscious attitude (see the next section on external obstacles).
- The second relates to the difficulty of implementing actions and taking new decisions that have never been tested and therefore represent a risk of failure for employees. This is the role played by emotions, fear and negative consequences. In all our other analyses of organizations attempting to implement a transition strategy, the culture of innovation with its obligatory counterpart of the right to make mistakes and feedback emerges as the *sine qua non* conditions without which institutional innovations are impossible.

For example, the participants talk about the courage needed (which inevitably implicitly creates a difficulty!) to justify a decision taken with intuition. While this is acceptable for 'small' decisions, it is more difficult for strategic issues. How do you convince employees of the value of a decision taken intuitively? In fact, it is the status of reason that is raised here, even more so as employees demand objective criteria, often profitability figures and conventional KPIs.

Indeed, resistance to change is a normal reaction, hence the need to implement support strategies. The fact that others often act as a brake also means that the leader needs to be able to identify allies with whom to implement change.

## THE BRAIN AND EMOTIONS WHEN FACED WITH CHANGE

Whether from employees, suppliers or customers, business leaders wishing to embark on or accelerate a process of transformation for their company face the same challenges as any other player faced with a process of change, whatever the field. The behavioral sciences offer several explanations for this.

Put simply, the brain is lazy (Stanovich, 2009) and constantly in demand. To reduce its load (and therefore its energy consumption), it uses several strategies: habits in daily practices and routines, social representations, etc. Introducing a change to routines, whether at home or at work, involves a major additional cognitive effort and generates stress, even anxiety.

The risk of failure, the fear<sup>14</sup> of negative reactions from superiors and the uncertainty associated with new objectives or responsibilities are additional cognitive and emotional pressures that are very difficult to manage, particularly in a performance-based society. That's why it's so important to reassure and commit to supporting change step by step and gradually, increasing the difficulty and the challenge, which vary according to the individual and the company. This means offering operational (but also emotional and cognitive) tools for implementation.

## C OBSTACLES EXTERNAL TO THE COMPANY

Several external obstacles were also raised by the participants, such as economic difficulties (specific to the company or to a more general crisis) and above all the domination (in their ecosystem of suppliers, customers, other senior managers, etc.) of traditional visions of leadership and the company.

Indeed, both within the company and in the ecosystem, there are different visions of what a company is, its function, its identity and its objectives: profit-oriented or oriented towards humans and living things, or a combination of the two? As we have already seen, in the participants' view, a company must contribute to society in the broad sense of the term.

While this vision is becoming more common, particularly with the development of the mission-driven enterprise movement, it is far from dominant. The alternative vision of leadership and enterprise proposed by HLU can shake up social norms. For example, giving a specific place to intuition and empathy in the workplace means attacking the place of reason and cognitive decision-making in our society much more broadly than within the strict framework of the company.

Carrying the vision of a contributing company guided by Heart Intelligence is far from obvious in a competitive world characterized essentially by the profit motive. Customers and suppliers may not understand (or agree with) the mindset and objectives of the company's transformation process. Furthermore, external partners

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<sup>14</sup> On the role of fear specifically, for example, see Castillo-Huitrón et al., 2020, and on the role of emotions more generally in transition, see White and Hardisty, 2019.

may not be able to respond to new demands or may feel that the effort involved is too great (or pointless, or even counterproductive) and may be reluctant to accept new dictates.

In the face of these obstacles, which are more broadly linked to the context in which companies operate, exchanges between participants once again play an important role in terms of self-confidence and experience sharing. Beyond this, HLU's very purpose is to encourage the development of a movement of leaders driven by the heart to influence leadership practices.

## CONCLUSION

This exploratory research leads us to conclude that the program had several effects on the participants and their company: it accelerated awareness, transformed the self and encouraged the taking of action. One fundamental point emerges here, which all participants emphasized: transforming a company depends on the prior transformation (to a greater or lesser extent) of the senior manager as an individual.

In the case of this first cohort of course participants, the 'Straight from the Heart' program provided them with tools and reinforced and accelerated the personal journey on which they had already embarked without creating a 'revolution in mentality'. It offered them "a better base from which to act" thanks to their greater self-knowledge acquired. For the majority, it provided a mechanism for developing, deepening, reassuring and formalizing efforts and intentions that were often pre-existing, even if they sometimes remained vague or not consciously planned. Thanks to the tools it provided, the exchanges between peers and with those involved, and the field visits, they were able to overcome their fears, feel less alone, gain confidence, and take action.

Ultimately, for the participants, leading from the heart and all that that implies is not always an easy path to follow, but they are satisfied with this path. While in the first wave of interviews they were mainly in HI "exploration and discovery" mode, they ended the course in "head/heart/body/company transformation alignment" mode. Not that this alignment is perfect or complete (they have too much experience to think that it ever will be), but it is much more solid and profound than before. Self-knowledge is "what makes alignment possible", and it is the major impact of the course on this point that makes action possible.

These elements reinforce the intuitions at the origin of the course. On the one hand, it is possible to teach Heart Intelligence: this is done through cognitive learning, by providing tools, but also and above all through practice, experience and discussion. On the other hand, HI, at the interface between the ability to assume one's intuition, empathy, courage, and self-confidence, can be mobilized by senior managers to help their companies evolve in all areas.

Finally, we would like to open up a few avenues for further research.



Part of the difficulty in assessing the impact of the course lies in the timeframe of the assessment. All the participants agree on the fact that many types of change, and in particular changes in governance, emerge over a long period of time, which extends beyond the life of the course itself. To measure the impacts (or lack of them), we would need to carry out post-project follow-up after 6, 12 and 18 months, for example.

Furthermore, the conclusions on the impacts of the program are based on what the participants say, and they rightly stress the importance of subjectivity in this type of assessment – which is precisely the strength of Heart Intelligence.

However, further work could be done to develop objective criteria. After all, both intuition and reason are considered to be complementary, justified, and useful decision-making methods by the participants and in the literature review. This will involve answering the following questions:

- How can we say whether a leader has been transformed or whether she or he has 'only' changed, according to what criteria and from what point of view?
- Fundamentally, what does a transformed company mean? In comparison to what starting point? What is the scale of change at company level?
- How should the HLU journey be assessed: do all the areas and strands of the HI need to be implemented to declare success or just some of them, and if so, which ones? To what extent?

# APPENDICES

## A BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE FIELD METHODOLOGY

Using the participants in the first intake of the "Straight from the Heart" program as a starting point, an action-research project was carried out to:

- 1- provide elements of conceptual and operational understanding;
- 2- assess the impact of the course on the participants' reactions and changes in their attitudes and positioning regarding the consideration of Heart Intelligence (HI) in leadership, in its various aspects (intuition, empathy, courage);
- 3- assess the impact of the course on participants' professional practices, the status of the various Heart Intelligence criteria in decision-making and their desire and intention to apply what they have learned in their work;
- 4- analyze the course itself as part of a process of continuous improvement of the methods used, with a view to making the training easier to replicate and disseminate.

### GENERAL PRESENTATION: THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE METHODOLOGY

A scientific review (in collaboration with Prophil) of Heart Intelligence and its components was carried out, incorporating various angles of understanding capable of explaining all or part of the changes in attitudes, representations and observable behaviour.

#### THE EMPIRICAL METHOD WAS BASED ON:

- Three waves of semi-structured interviews with each participant (one hour).
  - Semi-directive framing interviews before the first module to have a starting point of reference ("point zero" to enable comparison with the subsequent phases).
  - Semi-structured interviews at the half-way stage (following module 4).
  - Semi-structured interviews at the end of the course (following module 7).
- Post-module surveys (eight in all).

After each module, the participants were asked to complete a short evaluation questionnaire. These questionnaires, devised together with the HLU team, were designed to evaluate not only the module itself but also changes in participants' perceptions, understanding and representations of HI, its components (associated with the theme of each module) and the obstacles and driving forces associated with putting them into practice.

### **CROSS-ANALYSIS**

An analysis of each of the corpora (interviews, questionnaires and literature review) and methods and their comparison (similarities and differences) was used to compare the corpora and the cross-sectional analysis to provide significant elements of understanding not only practices but also the participants' conception of HI, its components and how they put them into practice, as well as the impact of the modules on taking action.

### **FOCUS ON THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW**

In social science methods, it is generally accepted that semi-structured face-to-face interviews are the most appropriate way of addressing issues that have received little research and for which there are no conclusive results or generally established knowledge. When the issues are well defined, large-scale statistical surveys (i.e. quantitative surveys) are appropriate, as they allow data to be generalized across a population. However, they are less suited to gathering new aspects, particularly subjective and qualitative aspects, the analysis of which is key to understanding the obstacles to changes in values and practices. Qualitative analysis using semi-structured interviews makes this possible. Of course, a single study with a dozen participants does not allow statistical generalization to an entire population or even to a sub-population of managers at national level, but that is not the aim here.

It is in this context that we need to understand the relevance of the semi-structured interviews with the participants in the 'Straight from the Heart' program: they aim to encourage the respondents to talk about a subject through a semi-free discussion mode, framed by themes and reminders. This requires a degree of communicative intelligence that questionnaires do not require. The great advantage of the semi-structured interview is that it leaves the respondent free to express his or her needs, feelings, doubts, and misunderstandings. The interviewer can also identify hesitations, tensions and contradictions (or, conversely, enthusiasm) in real time, which can be exploited to encourage the respondent to go into more detail and to be more specific. Lastly, it enables the interviewer to identify subjects that the respondent spontaneously broaches or fails to mention. It should be noted that analysis of interviews can provide a basis for testing the potential generalization of some of the results by means of a large-scale questionnaire later.

It should be noted that the interviews conducted as part of this action-research program were different to those previously carried out by the investigator in other projects (over 400 interviews conducted in total) in that they were more introspective, sometimes tantamount to a psychotherapy session, involving questioning oneself, expressing doubts and intimate, personal learning.

Ultimately, the aim was for an analysis based on the behavioral sciences to I) contribute to scientific knowledge on these issues and II) improve the process, form, content and impact of the approach applied by HLU to the participants.

In each of the three waves of interviews we dealt with three main topics (which were adjusted for each wave):

- **Topic 1:** motivations for taking part in the training course (then, in waves 2 and 3: general feedback on the previous modules, the course in general, their initial expectations and their new expectations; what they had learnt and what they would like to learn more about).
- **Topic 2:** overall perceptions and representations of I) leadership; II) Heart Intelligence and aspects thereof, etc.) and III) heart-driven leadership (then, in the other two waves: perception of the impact of the program on these representations and on the associated practices).
- **Topic 3:** perceptions and representations of Heart Intelligence in action, in the day-to-day practices of professional life; (then, in the other two waves: perception of the impact of the course on these practices and on governance and the collective in the third wave).

A cross-sectional analysis of the three waves of interviews enabled us to draw up an assessment of the changes in the participants' representations, understanding and practices. In waves 2 and 3, most of the discussions focused on the impact of the topics covered in the previous modules on I) (declared) practices in the professional context – management, governance, interpersonal relations, suppliers and customers, etc. – and on II) the understanding, values, perceptions and representations of Heart Intelligence in leadership, in order to analyze the evolutions within each participant and then collectively.

## B OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR COMPANIES

ORGANIZATION & LEADER	POSITION	STATUS	KEY FIGURES	SECTOR
BAYARD Florence Guémy	Chief executive officer	Société Anonyme	Founded: 1873 1640 employees €345M sales (2021)	Media
NAOS Mira Draganova	Director of the Central Eastern Europe region	SAS	Founded: 1977 3026 employees €630M sales (2021)	Health & / Beauty
ROOLE Frédéric Jaubert Servane Petit Jérôme Decroix	Former Chief Executive Officer Human Resources Director Chief Financial Officer	Insurance brokerage company	Founded: 1982 270 employees 494M sales (2021)	Mobility / insurance
SEABIRD Cyrille Vu	Chief Executive Officer and majority shareholder (55%)	SAS	Founded: 2005 210 employees €30M sales (2021)	Consulting / insurance / finance
VOISIN MALIN Anne Charpy	President of the Board, Director, and Founder	Not-for-profit (Association loi 1901)	Founded: 2010 180 employees €2.5M sales (2022)	Social
JANUS Michel Meunier	Executive Officer General Manager Partner & majority shareholder (94%)	SARL	Founded: 2013 14 employees €1.2M sales (2020)	Building/Shopfitting
ADAXO Odile Ehrbar	Director and founder Sole shareholder	SAS	Founded: 2004 5 employees €1M sales (2019)	Maintenance equipment
RCBM Rhoda Mígaud	Founder and sole shareholder	SASU	Founded: 2020 1 employee	Consulting / bancassurance

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## ABOUT US



Founded by 15 business leaders, Heart Leadership University is an educational and scientific non-profit organization.

Our mission is to revolutionize the education of business leaders, renew the imaginaries of leadership, and bring to the fore a movement of leaders who will lead, innovate, and make decisions from the heart (with intuition, courage, and empathy) to preserve our humanity and overcome the challenges of the 21st century (misuse of AI systems, ecological collapses, rampant inequalities).

Our activities: a transformation pathway for company managers, spaces for information and debates, and research activities.

Guided by its Scientific Advisory Board, HLU conducts independent, interdisciplinary research work in a singular field: that of relations (inter-human relations, relations with other living creatures, with machines). Largely unexplored, this field is nonetheless fundamental, insofar as relations are at the heart of what makes us human beings. Our current programs are focused on leaders and the exercise of leadership. How, as sensitive human beings, do leaders relate with their living environment, with their field of operation? Can leaders really transform their companies by making strategic decisions driven from the heart? What are the imaginaries of leadership of yesterday and of today, and what kind of leaders do we want for the 21st century? What are the consequences of deploying artificial intelligence systems on the quality of human relations, and on the capacity of leaders to make decisions in total freedom? These are some of the questions that our work aims to document, disseminate and debate.

To find out more, visit [our website](https://heartleadershipuniversity.org).

# OUR PARTNER



[Stéphane La Branche](#) is a climate sociologist and scientific coordinator of the [IPBC](#). In view of my research in the social sciences of climate and energy (nearly 40 studies) I was appointed the expert reviewer of the 5th and 6th IPCC reports. I explore the obstacles to and drivers (habits, social representations, day-to-day constraints, institutional functioning, etc.) of changes in the practices and functioning of institutions (companies, associations, and public authorities) in relation to climate, energy and air quality in order to propose appropriate and effective responses. The operational results of my research have been incorporated into prospective scenarios to 2050, and into transition policies and transition projects for private operators (energy and engineering companies), public operators (ministries and local authorities) and associations.

The IPBC is the international multidisciplinary group of experts on behavior. Its mission is to bring together the various behavioral sciences, ranging from the natural sciences, brain biology and neuro-cognition to philosophy, anthropology, semiotics, sociology and many others. Ultimately, our aim is to develop trans-disciplinary approaches aimed at understanding the factors driving change and non-change in behavior in the context of transition at all levels: individual, local and regional, national and global. The IPBC has already launched the [process of drafting the first main report](#) on these factors of change and non-change.



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