

Christmas Speech: Together shaping the future of TSB

Jantine Schuit, Dean of Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, 21 december 2017

Welcome everyone. Thank you for being here. It is three months since I started as Dean in our faculty and for me this is a perfect moment to share with you my impressions of my first 100 days: what surprised me and also what impressed me. I want to share with you my vision on the future of our school and how I see my role and your role in the coming years.

I have visited all our departments. I have asked you: 'what does it mean to you to work here? What are you proud of, what are your concerns?' I have talked with an interesting variety of people in various ways and at many occasions. I will give some examples of things that truly inspired me, and that made me privileged to be your Dean.

Firstly I am very pleased to have learnt about the high level of education we offer at TSB. We offer unique programs such as the Bachelor GMSI and the Master Medical Psychology. In the last couple of years you/we have made enormous progress in re-vitalizing our bachelor programs. The *bachelor of Psychology*, has been completely re-structured, well-organized, giving students more room to choose. Also the bachelor of *Sociology* has been completely restructured. Both bachelors are now being offered in English. With these changes we immediately see the effect on the number of additional students, international AND Dutch. It shows we were able to meet the demands of the student of today. And in addition, we also contribute to the strategic course of our university to grow. Above all, despite the pressure of increasing number of students we still score very well in the rankings of student satisfaction: we are able to maintain or even improve the quality of our education. This is really something to be proud of and I would like to thank all staff, academic and supporting staff in making this happen.

During my visits at your departments you have shown me several research projects. I saw a beautiful and interesting variety of research. Of course, it was only a glance of what we do and we had too little time to discuss, so I'm looking forward to learn more about our research in the coming months. Our research is of high quality, we score well and publish in high impact journals. Moreover, our research is also characterized by the outstanding societal relevance. There are many collaborations with societal partners. And this is not just me saying this. In the recent scientific audit of our Psychology research our School was valued very high. The committee assessed the quality of our research, the societal relevance and the viability of our research ALL with 'very good' compared to international standards. Really something to be proud of.

But all this teaching and research is done by the people of TSB. You are the basis, the foundation. Listening to you, I was caught by your enthusiasm and drive. Each department has its own way of working, atmosphere and culture and there are differences in governance and meeting structures between the departments. But in every department I experienced good atmosphere, a lot of humor and drive. I felt the willingness to improve and the enthusiasm for the research and education. I want to mention two examples that have inspired or impressed me. First, a recent one and that is TESC. It was so good to see so much interest and enthusiasm at the kick off. If we keep up this energy I am sure that this initiative will become a great success. Not only for this team but for our whole school. The second example I'm impressed by is the way TSB has made our science more transparent and ethically sound

with the initiation of the Ethical Research Board and the Science Committee. We are now an international leader in responsible research practice.

You have also shared your concerns with me. The *shady side* of success, ambition and loyalty is work pressure. You have told me that you do not have enough time: time to do good research, time to prepare for teaching, time to reflect, to take a moment and think and create. Because of the increased number of students, the internationalization, and the small scale teaching, the teaching demands have risen, while resources have not always been increased. This has led to high work load and leaves little time for recovery, reflection and innovation. Moreover, you have told me that the system in which you work puts too much pressure on you, you experience more pressure for accountability and intensified administrative duties. Sometimes you do not even know exactly WHAT is expected from you, or WHY or WHO's decision it is. I hear this among all layers of TSB. The system and procedures complicate your work and make it more time consuming. You have told me that the lack of communication leads to lack of transparency regarding roles, responsibilities and tasks. I will come back to this in a few minutes.

Based on these impressions, the strategic plan of TSB and the Tilburg University, I want to share with you, in the second part of my talk, my vision of the future of TSB. How I would like to play a part in this and what we need to do together. I want to address two things in particular: 1. the strategic course of the faculty and 2. How we can together strengthen ourselves, the foundation of our school.

First a few words on the strategy of our School. Our Strategic Plan describes how our society is facing great challenges of globalization, digitalization, and other complex social issues such as inequality and chronic diseases. It is our task as researchers to study these social issues and to come up with solutions. This calls for greater emphasis on *multi-disciplinary research* and education and more emphasis on *impact*. Of course interdisciplinary research requires a solid disciplinary foundation, including fundamental research. So I truly believe that we need both.

During my visits you have shown me examples of collaboration with colleagues within our school and with other schools and universities. We already work together with a lot of academic and societal partners, but I believe that there is room for more interdisciplinary collaboration. If we really *want to address complex social issues we need to collaborate more with colleagues from adjacent disciplines than we do now*. It requires new forms of collaboration with other disciplines with other dynamics, other languages and different methodologies. For example with respect to the themes ageing, inequality, behavior. There are also a lot of opportunities to share dataset and methodology. Sometimes research in one department has consequences for research in others. We should know that. There are great opportunities here. We have already a lot of disciplines in our house. I personally would like to contribute by supporting and facilitating more interdisciplinary collaboration within the school and outside. I would like to stimulate that staff working on the same topics share their knowledge and experience and try to look at it at another angle. It will enrich their view and also will make the research better and more comprehensive.

The second opportunity I want to raise is the question of 'what makes TSB what it is?' How does it characterize itself? Based on what you have shown me in the last couple of months I believe that the topic that connects us all in TSB, in research and education, is *well-being*. The *well-being of individuals, groups and organizations*. Well-being in relation to health and in the way we are able to adapt to changing context. This theme is very much in line with the strategic theme of the university and with the national science agenda. I believe that we should make this theme more central, more prominent in our

School. This will help us *to profile* our School better and distinguish ourselves from other faculties of social and behavioral sciences. I personally believe that working on well-being is valuable because by advancing this knowledge we will contribute to healthier and more resilient people who are able to manage their life, in light of social, physical and emotional challenges. I am therefore also very pleased with the initiation of the Simon Research Institute, a School wide research program with the aim to perform *excellent* research in this field. In the next months we will give more body to this SRI. Personally I want to be the ambassador of our faculty, of our work. To make more visible of what we do and how it contributes to the well-being, the health and resilience of society. I want to give the School a face and a voice. And in order to do that you need to give me input to make this happen.

The basis for good research and education is high-performing staff. And we are high performing. Again I speak about academic and supporting staff. But you have also shown me your concerns. Therefore I believe that we should not only *study well-being*, but also take care for the *well-being of our own staff*. There are two things I want to say about this

First, I find it very important to work in an environment where we give each other academic AND social support. To me good scientists are people who take their responsibility and use their knowledge and skills to teach students, to support their colleagues and to bring their knowledge to society. I believe in a working environment where all levels participate in decision making, where there is transparency regarding the division of work and career opportunities, a safe working environment in which people feel free to share ideas and knowledge, and to experiment. There should be room for reflection and personal growth, especially for young people in the early phase of their career. In other words an organization where there is *trust*. To support this we need leadership in all layers of the organization. It is not just the responsibility of the head of departments but of all of you. We all have the responsibility to care for our colleagues when it comes to offering support in times of work pressure.

A good foundation also includes a system with sufficient financial resources, good communication and transparency of decision making processes. At present our faculty is doing well financially and we are going to invest our reserves in the next coming years. There is room for investment in teaching staff and in creating new opportunities for innovation. At present we are discussing with the head of departments on how to invest these reserves and make sustainable choices. We also will try to pay more attention to how we can better plan and organize our work processes. Together with the head of departments I will seek to reduce administrative tasks and minimize bureaucracy without endangering risks in academic performance or organizational processes. We will try to work on a system where we communicate well and are *transparent* of what is expected in terms of tasks, roles and responsibilities. I know that teaching load is particularly a problem and therefore we look for opportunities to create air there, in order to create recovery time and to create time for research.

So, TSB is doing very well. The quality of our education and research is high. We are viable, we are societally relevant and financially in a good shape. So there are a lot of opportunities for us. At the same time I see the work load has increased in the past years and I see how it affects you. In the coming years, I will work hard, together with my management team and the Heads of Department to try to give more room for growth and innovation, and by making our processes more transparent and communicate better.

But I also need your commitment. I need YOU to also take your responsibility. I want you to be open for other people, other disciplines and learn from this. I want you to give honest feedback to each other.

Not only once in a year during our R&O meetings, but throughout the year. And it is not just about saying what can be done better, but also about giving each other compliments and celebrate our successes. And I'm sure that there will even be more successes ahead.

And to walk the talk I would like to give a word of thanks, in this final part of my speech, to some of you who have made a special contribution to TSB and were very valuable for the whole school and who stepped down from their positions. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Seeger Breugelmans for the excellent contribution he has made to the renewing of our bachelor Psychology. Also I would like to thank Nina Kupper for her contribution to the Ethical Research Board of our school. She has been the driving force in this. Also Marc van Veldhoven as the chair of our Scientific Committee, the committee that carefully evaluates the quality of our data collection and data handling. I also want to thank my management team and head of departments for the way they have introduced me within this excellent school and made me feel very welcome. And last but not least I would like to thank you all for your hard work in the past year and your enthusiasm and drive.

I wish you a well-deserved holiday, a wonderful Christmas-time with your beloved ones and a healthy, resilient and a happy start of 2018. Thank you.