

Insight-Out Leadership Training 2026

(Interim Report)



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1. Programme at a Glance

Insight-Out Leadership is an international leadership development programme, exploring leadership from the inside out: beginning with personal reflection, values and self-awareness and connecting these with relationships, responsibility and action in the wider world.

Key Facts

Residential training: 10-14 August 2026.

Travel days: 9 & 15 August 2026.

Location: Schloss Kalkhorst, Northern Germany.

Working language: English.

Participants: 14 of various ages.

Countries represented: 11.

Belarus · Canada · Germany · India · Indonesia · Morocco · Nepal · Netherlands · Syria · Ukraine · USA

Facilitation by: Bhavesh S Patel (UK), Ruve Narang (India), Diana Damsa (Romania), Reham Ibrahim (Egypt), Sebastian Hasse (Germany).

Programme Manager: Sebastian Hasse.

Visual Communications Manager: Ruve Narang.

Logistical Support: Olena Brandt.



2. The Learning Journey

The five-day residential training is the central intensive learning experience within a longer process.



Our Focus

The programme approaches leadership as more than a set of skills. It creates space for participants to explore:

- **Self:** values, self-awareness, personal patterns and the inner source of guidance.
- **Relationships:** listening, trust, communication and navigating differences.
- **Responsibility:** understanding one's contribution to society and the impact of one's choices.
- **Action:** translating personal insights and values into responsible leadership practice.

Supported by

The 2026 Insight-Out Leadership programme was made possible through the financial support of:

Foundation for a Spiritual and Moral Renewal (Sweden)

Initiatives of Change USA

Individual donors

as well as logistical, outreach and communications support by **Initiative Mittel- und Osteuropa e.V.** (Germany) and **Centre for Social Transformation** (Romania).

Everyone involved in developing and delivering the programme - including the programme manager, facilitators and visual communications manager - contributed their time on a voluntary basis. In addition, the venue supported the programme by offering accommodation and meals at a significantly reduced rate.

Their support enabled us to bring together a diverse international group and create an intensive residential learning environment, followed by continued support and exchange over the coming months.

3. The Insight-Out Approach

What does it mean to lead others if we do not understand what guides our own choices?

Insight-Out Leadership starts with the idea that meaningful leadership begins within. Before focusing on tools, positions or external influence, participants are invited to explore their own values, motivations, patterns and ways of relating to others. From there, the programme gradually turns outward: towards relationships, responsibility and the question of how we want to contribute to the world around us.

From insight to action

Throughout the programme, participants explore leadership across interconnected dimensions:

Self-awareness and values

Understanding what matters to us, recognising our ways of thinking and developing greater clarity about how our values influence our decisions.

Relationships and dialogue

Practising listening, trust, empathy and communication, while learning to engage constructively with different perspectives.

Responsibility and leadership

Reflecting on the influence we have - whether or not we hold a formal leadership position - and the responsibility that comes with our choices and actions.

Putting insight into practice

Connecting personal learning with participants' everyday lives, communities and areas of engagement.



How we learn

The residential training was designed as an **experiential learning process rather than a sequence of lectures**. Short conceptual inputs were combined with exercises, individual reflection, small-group conversations, facilitated dialogue and shared experiences.

An important part of this approach was the diversity within the group. Participants brought perspectives from 11 countries and very different personal, cultural and professional

contexts. Differences were therefore not only discussed as a leadership challenge; they became part of the learning experience itself.

The residential setting also created something that is often difficult to find in everyday life: **time and space to slow down, listen and reflect**. Participants were encouraged not simply to find quick answers, but to become more attentive to themselves and others.

The five-day retreat was designed to initiate this process, not to complete it. During the three-month follow-up phase, participants will continue exploring how the insights gained during the residential training translate into their relationships, decisions and leadership practice. And they have been encouraged to continue the practice of slowing down and listening within everyday.



4. Five Days of Learning and Community

For five days, Schloss Kalkhorst became a shared space for learning, reflection, creativity and community. The programme combined structured workshops with experiential exercises, artistic expression, storytelling and time spent together outside the training room.

A daily rhythm of reflection and exchange

Each morning began with **Slowing Down** - a quiet space to pause, reflect and become present before starting the day and to listen to the quieter deeper voices inside that might offer guidance.

In the late afternoons, participants met in smaller groups for sharing life stories, personal experiences and getting to know one another beyond professional roles and national backgrounds. To support this process, participants created **collages about their lives**, which became starting points for sharing their personal stories.

Together, Slowing Down and life story sharing provided a recurring rhythm throughout the five days, complementing the more structured learning sessions.



Exploring leadership through experience

The programme began with a fundamental question: **What is leadership?** From there, sessions explored different dimensions of leading oneself and engaging with others.

A longer workshop on **Listening** examined what it means to listen with attention and curiosity. In **Values**, participants explored the principles guiding their decisions and were challenged by a moral dilemma in which they had to take a position, listen to opposing perspectives and defend their choices - bringing questions of values, responsibility and judgement into a concrete situation.

Other sessions moved from the personal towards the dynamics of groups and systems. Through the **Red-Blue Game**¹, participants experienced how trust, communication and short-term decisions can produce either cooperative or competitive dynamics. The game creates incentives both to cooperate and to pursue one's own team's advantage, making the consequences of trust and competition tangible rather than merely theoretical.



A simulation on **water scarcity** within a fictional small town took this exploration further. Participants represented different stakeholders within that town and had to negotiate how a limited water supply should be used despite conflicting priorities. The exercise brought questions of competing needs, limited resources, negotiation and collective responsibility into the room.

The session on **Complexity** then provided another lens through which to understand leadership: not every challenge has a simple solution, and leadership often means acting in situations shaped by uncertainty, interdependence and different perspectives.

Creativity as a way of learning

Artistic expression was deliberately integrated into the programme as another way to reflect, communicate and connect.

In one session, participants were invited to **rewrite a poem by weaving in details of their own upbringing**. Sharing these poems became one of the most warm-hearted and intense moments of the week. Very early in the programme, it opened a window into participants' different lives and experiences and helped create a strong sense of trust and connection within the group.

The art activities also offered another perspective on leadership. They encouraged participants to move beyond analytical thinking and explore **creativity, reflection,**

¹ A more detailed description of the Red-Blue Game can be found here:
<https://www.rationalgames.com/the-red-blue-game>

adaptability, collaboration and communication - capacities that are as relevant to leadership as directing or making decisions.²

Learning beyond the training room

On the third day, we changed the rhythm and spent half of the day walking through the countryside to the Baltic Sea, where we witnessed a **partial solar eclipse** together and enjoyed the summer weather.



The excursion was combined with a **land art session**. Working only with natural materials found at the beach, participants responded creatively to what was available around them rather than working from predetermined resources.

The exercise provided a simple metaphor for leadership: **adapting to circumstances, working resourcefully with what is already there and creating something together from unexpected possibilities.**

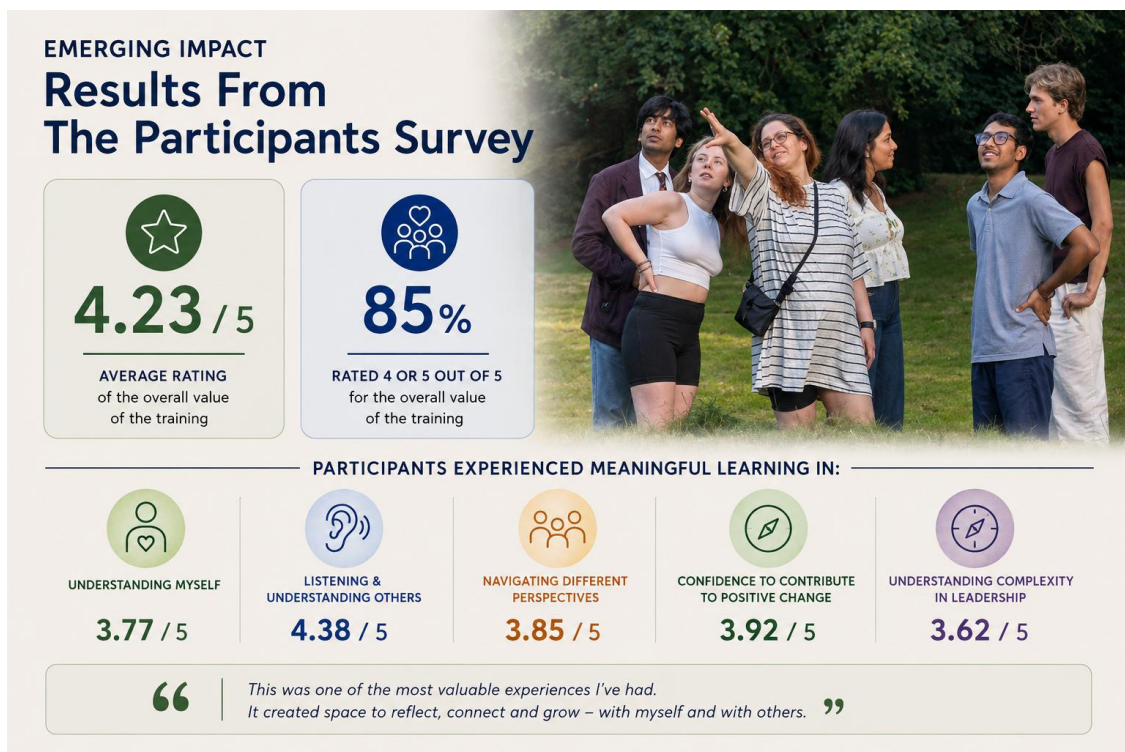
The walk, beach and creative work also provided space for informal conversations, rest and connection after several intensive days and gave renewed energy and team spirit for participants and facilitators, reminding us that meaningful learning does not only happen in the training room.

Across the five days, participants moved repeatedly between **reflection and action, analysis and creativity, the individual and the group, structured learning and informal community life.**

² This is supported by a 2024 review of 31 empirical studies, which found that art-based leadership development can strengthen reflective thinking, emotional intelligence and interpersonal competencies, including communication, empathy and collaboration:
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39199110/>

5. Emerging Impact: What Participants Tell Us

An evaluation taken at the end of the programme provides an encouraging first picture of what the residential training set in motion. Participants particularly described changes in how they relate to themselves, to others and to leadership. At this stage, these findings represent **emerging impact**; longer-term changes will be explored during the three-month follow-up phase.



Slowing down to lead more intentionally

One of the clearest themes in the written responses was **slowing down**. Several participants described wanting to pause before acting, become more conscious of their priorities and make decisions that are more closely aligned with their values.

“I want to learn to slow down intentionally in my day-to-day life [...] be kinder to myself, commit to different things, activities and people more consciously.”

What began as a daily practice during the retreat therefore became, for some participants, an approach they want to integrate into everyday life.

Exploring different sides of being a leader

Participants also reflected on personal patterns, strengths, vulnerabilities and boundaries, and on how these influence the way they engage with others.

“It made me realize that I’m the most important resource in my leadership journey.”

Some responses also indicate a broader understanding of leadership - moving beyond formal positions or directing others towards listening, creating space for others and becoming more conscious of one's own influence.

Learning through difference

The diversity of the group became an important part of the learning experience. Participants described being challenged by different backgrounds, personalities, values and perspectives.

The international learning community, combined with exercises involving disagreement, cooperation and negotiation, provided opportunities to experience these differences rather than only discussing them theoretically.

From insight to intention

Participants identified concrete things they want to take into their lives: slowing down and practising silence, listening differently, making more values-conscious decisions, setting clearer priorities and boundaries, and applying elements of the programme in their own work and communities.

These are currently **intentions rather than demonstrated long-term changes**. The three-month follow-up will therefore explore what participants have been able to put into practice, what challenges they encounter and how their understanding of leadership continues to develop.



6. The Learning Environment

The programme was shaped not only by its sessions, but also by **who came together and where the learning took place.**



Diversity as part of the learning

With 14 participants from **11 countries**, complemented by an international facilitation team, the group brought together a wide range of cultural backgrounds, experiences and perspectives on leadership.

This diversity became part of the learning itself. Different values, communication styles and perspectives created both connection and curiosity, as well as disagreement and challenge. Through dialogue, experiential exercises and living together for five days, participants engaged with these differences in practice.

A place to slow down

The residential setting at **Schloss Kalkhorst** was an important part of creating the conditions for learning. Its quiet surroundings, extensive grounds and proximity to nature gave participants space to step away from everyday routines and focus fully on the experience.

The setting supported both sides of the programme: **community and connection**, through shared meals and informal conversations, as well as **personal reflection**, through opportunities to withdraw, walk and spend time alone.

Learning for future iterations

Feedback on the venue was very positive overall. Participants also identified practical areas for improvement, particularly **Wi-Fi and presentation equipment, lighting and acoustics, accessibility and access to shops**. These insights will help us preserve what worked while improving the practical conditions for future programmes.

7. What Worked and What We Learned

The residential training was also a learning process for us as a team. Participant feedback and our own reflections helped us identify elements we want to preserve as well as areas we would develop further in a future iteration.

What we want to keep

Several elements proved particularly valuable:

- **Slowing Down and storytelling** created a strong rhythm between individual reflection, deeper connection and structured learning.
- **Experiential methods** such as the Red-Blue Game, the moral dilemma and the water scarcity simulation allowed participants to experience leadership dynamics rather than only discuss them.
- **Diversity within the group** brought different perspectives into the room and became a learning resource in itself.
- The **residential setting and time in nature** supported both community-building and personal reflection.
- Participants particularly valued learning around **listening, self-awareness and engaging with different perspectives**.

Where we want to go deeper

One important learning concerns the programme's central theme itself: **leadership**.

Our approach understands leadership not primarily as a formal position, but as a **capacity that anyone can offer - anytime, anywhere and with anyone**. We realised that this understanding should be communicated more clearly before the programme and explored more explicitly during the retreat.

In a future iteration, we would therefore invite participants to explore “*What does leadership mean to me?*” at both the beginning and the end of the residential training. Comparing the two reflections could make shifts in participants' understanding visible.

This also connects with the evaluation: while participants reported meaningful learning in many areas, **understanding their own role as a leader/change-maker received one of the lower ratings**. Rather than treating this simply as a weakness, we see it as an indication of where the programme can go deeper.

Similarly, we would dedicate more attention to **what complexity means for leadership**: How do we lead when there is no clear solution, when perspectives conflict and when our actions have consequences we cannot fully predict?

More space for experience and participant leadership

Some of our most experiential sessions needed more time than anticipated. In particular, the **Red-Blue Game and water scarcity simulation** would benefit from longer time slots for the experience itself and, importantly, for reflection and harvesting afterwards.

Participants already contributed to running the retreat through small service shifts around mealtimes. In future, we would like to extend this principle by inviting participants to take on **small leadership roles within the programme**, for example facilitating ice-breakers or leading daily harvesting and reflection.



Finding the right group size

Finally, we want to reconsider the ideal group size. Our experience highlighted two different possibilities: a slightly smaller group of around **12 participants** could create more intimate spaces for dialogue and personal sharing, while a larger group of up to **20 participants** could increase the diversity of perspectives and interactions.

Rather than assuming that bigger is necessarily better, we want future programme design to make this choice deliberately according to the kind of learning environment we want to create.

These reflections give us a clearer picture of the programme's strengths and of how a future iteration could become **more focused, participatory and intentional in its exploration of leadership**.

8. The Journey Continues

The five days at Schloss Kalkhorst were an intensive part of the programme - but they were not the end of the learning journey.



The current report captures an important milestone rather than the conclusion of the programme. The next three months are about finding out what happens when insight meets everyday life.

Closing / Participant Voices

“ Your support in this program for other individuals to be part of this program means you’re enabling to create the society that you believe in. ”

“ Funding this project enables more young professionals to lead with thorough self insight. ”

“ It provides longer term support to preserve the results of the 5 days and connect them to realities of participants in order to make their communities/work/personal life better. ”

“ Should continue because it actually has an impact that I tested myself. ”

With gratitude 

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 *Thank you for making this learning journey possible.*