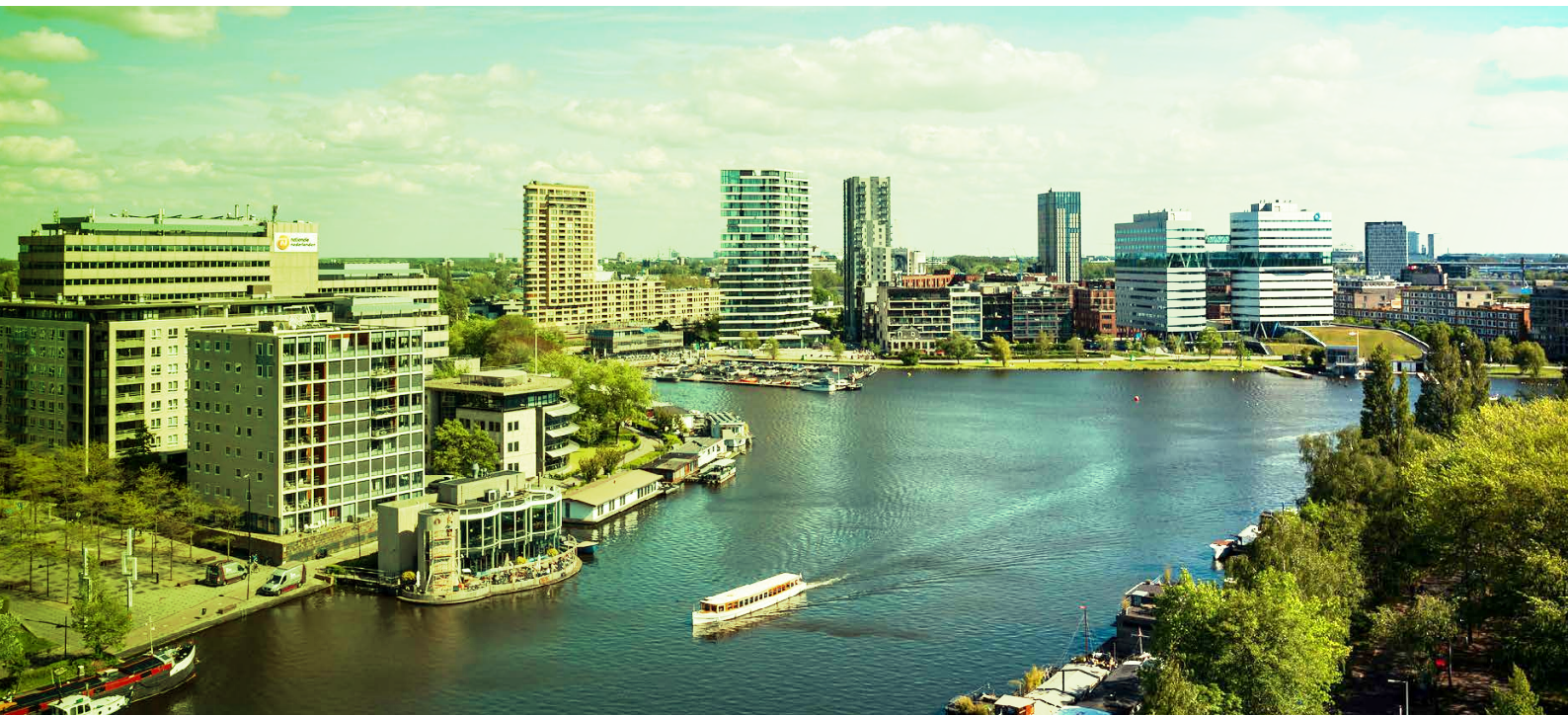




CHRO FORUM



CHRO Forum, The Annual Meeting 2022

Humanizing Growth

WPP Campus, Amsterdam
May 12, 2022

Humanizing Growth

Every business needs to become more digital and human to remain relevant for the future. With this goal in mind, CHROs gathered at this Annual Meeting for a dialog on ‘the human side of transformation’. As part of the program, author, anthropologist, and news correspondent Joris Luyendijk gave a keynote speech based on his book *De zeven vinkjes* (‘The seven ticks’). The talk explored diversity in leadership in the Netherlands, and how organizations can work to attract and retain people with a wider range of qualities and life experiences.

Taking diversity conversations beyond ‘straight white males’

Beginning his talk, Joris noted that conversations around diversity often focus on ‘straight white males’. However, this category makes up around 40% of the Dutch population, including many people who have a migration background, parents with low literacy levels, or who are not educated to a high level (VWO, gymnasium, and/or university) themselves. As such, Joris reasoned, many straight white males are also familiar with forms of exclusion, intimidation, and discouragement.

These forms of discrimination are so powerful that the majority of ‘class migrants’ – those who migrate not between countries but between social classes – take steps to hide their backgrounds, and are often unaware of each other. Because of this, we are often more diverse than we might think in terms of class, but not necessarily inclusive. Organizations can overlook class in their conversations on diversity – and since class is a major source of exclusion, this is breeding resentment and creating a ‘time bomb’ under the inclusion and diversity movement.

‘Seven-tickers’: A small group with a large share of leadership positions

By contrast, people with the ‘seven ticks’ – straight, white, male, at least one highly educated or wealthy parent, at least one parent born in the Netherlands, a gymnasium or VWO education, and a university degree – make up the majority of those in leadership positions in the Netherlands. For instance, five out of the last six prime ministers and eight out of the last ten ministers of justice were ‘seven-tickers’. Given that this group makes up less than 3% of the population, Joris noted, this is quite remarkable. And, since seven-tickers have little experience of discrimination and cultural adjustment to draw on, it’s also concerning.

What do we really mean by ‘quality’?

The attitude that ‘diversity shouldn’t come at the expense of quality’ is common. But what do we mean by ‘quality’? Often, seven-tickers are the ones defining quality, in a way that makes it almost impossible to achieve for those who don’t look like them. In today’s job market, a gymnasium or VWO education is valued and networking is key to finding employment – often excluding people of color and people from working-class backgrounds. In the workplace, outer self-confidence is equated with leadership, and there is limited recognition of other leadership styles. This value system rewards those with more ‘ticks’: Statistics Netherlands (CBS) figures show that more ticks correlate with higher trust from others, which is what feeds self-confidence.

The skills and life experiences of seven-tickers are also often valued differently than those of so-called minorities, Joris observed. For instance, the *buitenlandervaring* (experience abroad) and language skills of someone who has immigrated from another country are often not considered as valuable as those of someone who has taken a gap year. This is despite the fact that resilience and cultural adjustment grow character, and that class diversity can add massive value to your organization by reducing its distance from the rest of society.

A crossroads for inclusion and diversity: What comes next?

Ultimately, Joris argued, diversity and inclusion is about dealing with difference. The issue with seven-tickers – across the Netherlands and the world – is that they will always deal with difference in the same way: from a position of dominance. To move toward a more diverse, inclusive world – where differences in class, gender, race, and so on can be fully expressed – we need broader definitions of leadership and ‘quality’.

Currently, diversity and inclusion efforts often aim to help ‘minorities’ become more like seven-tickers – for example, through courses on taking up space for women. Joris suggested that the real next step will be, for instance, to send men on courses on giving more space to others – in other words, to redefine forms of leadership.

How can we move forward?

Individual next steps will look different for everyone, Joris concluded. Someone might be highly aware of inclusion issues in one ‘tick’ category, but have limited awareness of another. And currently, there is still no ‘script’ for seven-tickers who have come to recognize the extent of inequality and discrimination in the Netherlands. The best starting point for addressing these issues, though, is to realize our limited knowledge of the experiences of people with fewer ‘ticks’ than us.

Above all, we need to dismantle the idea that the seven-ticker’s perspective and definition of ‘quality’ is the neutral one. It may be easier for leaders to get used to colleagues who look like them, but companies with more diverse pools of talent will benefit long-term. We can start working toward this tomorrow, becoming key figures for the next generation of leaders in our organizations. This kind of cultural transfer is key to creating a more diverse workforce. And, by facilitating the sharing of knowledge, these interactions will benefit seven-tickers, those with less than seven ticks, and organizations alike.

“Be curious about people and who they are. Instilling this curiosity in organizations will reveal people’s differences, but also their full value.”

“Attention to people is one of the main differentiators between high-performing and less-high-performing companies. People look for attention, empathy, curiosity, and dialog, not so much for structure and procedures.”

“Perform and transform – marrying the short- and long-term is difficult, but key to success.”

“By learning to understand employees, you can come up with a value proposition that is reflected both externally and internally.”

“Partnering with marketing departments could be an effective way for CHROs to translate the company brand to employee needs, in order to attract and retain the right people.”

“When there’s no recipe for dealing with uncertainty, what’s left is staying true to your organization’s purpose and values.”

“Diversity and inclusion is up to each of us – the ‘human’ in Human Resources is about CHROs as much as employees.”

Photo Impression





























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About CHRO Forum

KPMG, Randstad, Mercer and Transformation Forums are always keen on offering CHROs a peer to peer sharing platform to discuss, learn and inspire each other. Enabling people to be part of a meaningful community, this setting offers CHROs a reference on the speed of change, in order to gain actionable insights.

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