

EXPLORER MARTIJN ASLANDER

‘WE ARE LIVING IN A NEW RENAISSANCE’

In his latest book, *Nooit Af, (Never Finished)* which, as was the case with *Easycratie (Easycracy)* he wrote in tandem with Erwin Witteveen, Martijn Aslander is advocating a state of permanent beta. His argumentation follows from the way in which he interprets current trends in the network- and information society and topics such as self-direction and Quantified Self. ‘We’re living in a different world. The tools you need are available to anyone, even to young kids in Pakistan. You don’t need an expensive office to make a difference.’

TEXT HANS VAN DER KLIS // PHOTOGRAPHY FRANK GROELIKEN

Let’s get the label issue out of the way. What defines Martijn Aslander? Is he an author of management books? A professional speaker, a cultural philosopher, an initiator, an oracle? He uses the term ‘explorer’ on his website.

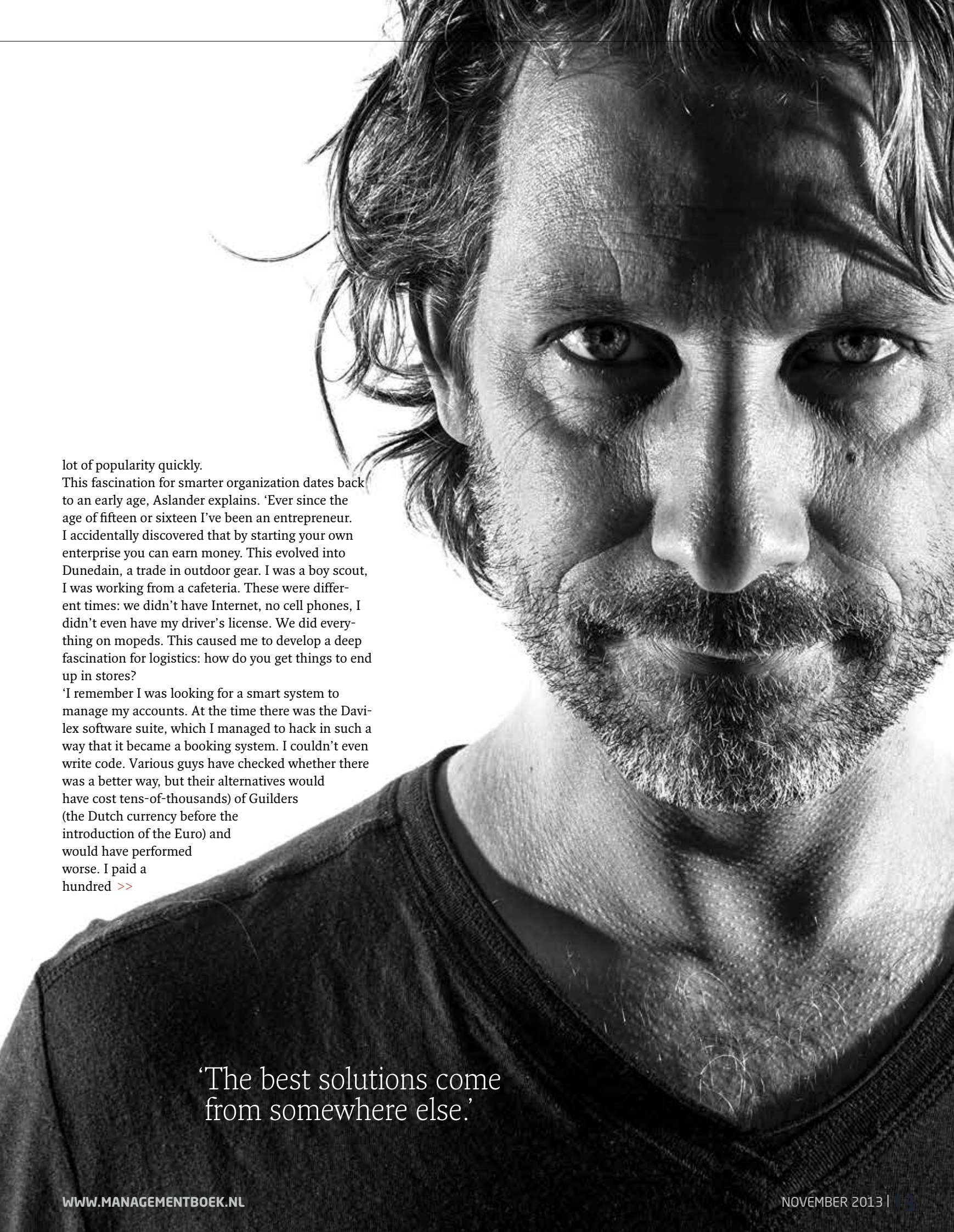
‘The trouble is, if you do things that are not conventional, it’s a quest to find the language that does yourself justice and explains to people what it is you do’, he says. ‘Since most people have heard of me through my book *Easycratie* I’m comfortable calling myself an author.’

Because I’m involved in so many different things simultaneously, I need help from people who are better at writing than I am. I can write just fine, but often I just don’t have the time. So I collaborate with people who are capable of committing my ideas to paper. It would sell them short to call them ghost writers. These people are simply too good at what they do. So that would make them a co-author, like Erwin Witteveen in the case of *Easycratie* and our new book, *Nooit Af*. He was the first one to write an article about me that was so spot on that my parents finally understood what it is I do.

We meet in Haarlem, where he moved to not too long ago. 41 year old Aslander has left Groningen and moved into an apartment over book shop H. de Vries. A somewhat symbolic location if you consider how eagerly he has been his whole life to absorb and combine information.

SMARTER ORGANISATION

To understand what Aslander is it helps to examine who he is. He became known as one of the initiators of the lifehacking movement, a group of people that promote the use of ICT and other simple tools to do more in less time, with less stress, at lower costs, causing more impact. Together with dozens of co-authors, among whom Frank Meeuwssen and Taco Oosterkamp, Aslander wrote a highly usable guide with (by now) 175 Lifehacking Tips, which gained a



lot of popularity quickly.

This fascination for smarter organization dates back to an early age, Aslander explains. 'Ever since the age of fifteen or sixteen I've been an entrepreneur. I accidentally discovered that by starting your own enterprise you can earn money. This evolved into Dunedain, a trade in outdoor gear. I was a boy scout, I was working from a cafeteria. These were different times: we didn't have Internet, no cell phones, I didn't even have my driver's license. We did everything on mopeds. This caused me to develop a deep fascination for logistics: how do you get things to end up in stores?

'I remember I was looking for a smart system to manage my accounts. At the time there was the Davilex software suite, which I managed to hack in such a way that it became a booking system. I couldn't even write code. Various guys have checked whether there was a better way, but their alternatives would have cost tens-of-thousands) of Guilders (the Dutch currency before the introduction of the Euro) and would have performed worse. I paid a hundred >>

'The best solutions come from somewhere else.'



CV

Martijn Aslander connects people, information and ideas. Applying a network's collective intelligence is his specialty. Together with **Frank Meeuwse** and **Sanne Roemen** he has gathered more bloggers around him and they initiated *Lifehacking.nl*. Next to this Aslander is a popular speaker at congresses and meetings. His theme is the network- and information society and the way in which we can improve our work and life in a smart way by using the possibilities of it.

www.martijnaslander.nl

and fifty Guilders for the Davilex solution. That's what I enjoy, a bit of tinkering and messing around with what's already available. I learned in those days that the best solution always comes from another discipline. You just have to listen for clues and iterate between the various disciplines.

A BIG, HAIRY, AUDACIOUS GOAL

The first time he managed to gather a truly large amount of people to back a larger mission was during a project called Gathering Stones in Borger, in 2002. Gathering Stones was a large festival based on the building of a dolmen (a metalithic tomb, made of two or more upright stones, supporting a large horizontal stone). 'I had tried to sell my company but this had gone completely wrong. I was unexperienced. So I was sitting there and I thought: what to do now? At that moment in time it seemed like a totally logical thing to do to build a dolmen. A Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal. It took us two years and it involved the help of 14.000 people.

It was the largest dolmen that had ever been built.

It was very cool to build something that had not been done in five thousand years. This festival was a life changing event, not just for me, but for the entire team. You couldn't have pulled off such a project with a normal action plan and normal project management. We had to continually think outside the box, everything you can possibly think of to manage crises in teams. To give an example: the government hasn't got a clue on how to deal with people who want to build a dolmen.

'How do you transport a ten thousand pound stone by road? Nobody had an answer. This was the moment I realized I'm good at connecting people, information and ideas - a bit like solving a puzzle. Who to call, how to get people to participate, who can work together and who can't, who to trust? I discovered that information is the bridge between people on the one hand, and ideas on the other hand. Because an idea is simply combined information. If you want to execute these ideas in the world you need people. My trinity of dynamics therefore consists of people, information and ideas.

THE NEW WORKPLACE

At one point Aslander discovered the concept of life hacking. 'Turned out there is a word for people

who were thinking about productivity on a meta level. Some people still snigger about it, but Fokke and Sukke (a well-known Dutch cartoon) had a cartoon devoted to life hacking. That means we're mainstream, don't you think? I gave hundreds of presentations on the topic. We collaborated with Nu.nl: *Lifehacking.nl* and have over 100.000 visitors a month. Twenty to thirty books have been published about the topic and these are all very successful. We were also one of the first parties to start giving books away for free. Your primary goal as an author is to be read, right?'

The enormous success of lifehacking has strengthened Aslander in his belief that this society is not designed for a smart organization of knowledge and information. 'We have five million knowledge workers in this country. But the average 17 year old has more powerful gear at his disposal in his attic than ninety per cent of the five million knowledge workers. And on the pretext of security they are working with extremely expensive gear. To protect five per cent of sensitive data we are destroying flexibility for one hundred per cent.

These are great structural flaws in our way of working. I can't spot many decisions that change this. The New Ways of Working? It's just The New Workplaces, a way to

need less office space. Traditional organizations are reluctant to acknowledge that there are smarter ways to do it.

MOOC'S

To demonstrate what has changed in the network- and information society Aslander uses the example of Jack Andraka, the 15 year old who, using only Google and Wikipedia, has found a better way to trace pancreatic cancer. 'Consider this: somebody without knowledge, without experience, without tools and without money comes up with a method to trace pancreatic cancer that is 196 times faster, 400 times more accurate and 26,000 times cheaper.'

'We fear lone wolves and weapons of mass destruction, but what the readers of this magazine should really fear are lone wolves with weapons of mass disruption. These are not incidents. People are discarding crowdsourcing, but recently I was at a meeting for Basel III, with the top executives of the Dutch banking and corporate world and what I observed there was truly saddening. Basel III is supposed

'We should fear lone
wolves with weapons of
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'Come on guys. We're living in a different world.'

to save banks, but if you ask me it's the end of banks in Europe. They aren't allowed anything. And if everything is off limits people will start working around it.

Somehow organizations and governments don't get that self-organization is more friction-free and cheaper than ever, partly because of social media. Four years ago, somebody wrote: The costs of stepping in the game of your passion are lower than ever. Everyone gets to join in. In the meantime we are having meetings, producing paper and business plans, and we're strictly monitoring the use of social media through the communications department. Nobody dares to take responsibility.

Come on guys. We're living in a different world. The tools you need are available for anyone. If you look at the number of employees of Forbes 500 companies you can see that an increasing number have only ten or twenty people working for them. It's like Seth Godin says: Small is the new big. You don't need a large team or expensive offices to make the difference and certainly no leased cars. The good thing is that it isn't just us who have these tools at our disposal, but also the kids in Pakistan and the slums of Brazil. Think about the impact that MOOC's, massive open online courses, are going to have. Harvard has announced it wants to serve 1 million students, MIT has the same target. They are going to pull it off. We are living in insane times.

PERMANENT BETA

This open network- and information society is also the subject of the new book by Aslander and Witteveen, *Nooit Af*. Trying to break down the limitations of bureaucracy in their previous book *Easycratie* they are now taking it one step further. *Never Finished* is advocating the state of permanent beta, a term that's used to describe the open developmental stage of applications. 'I'm starting to believe that we are trying too hard to finish things. It's only when it's finished that we are allowed to play with it.

But many online services remain in beta for a long time. Why? Through the experiences of users you can research what you have exactly, what the benefits are and what can be improved. We initiated a kind of innovation platform in Amersfoort without any money or official documents, in a space that was lent to us by the Chamber of Commerce in the Ondernemersplaza (Entrepre-

neur Plaza). We are hosting a lot of events that are free to attend and where no-one is making any money off it.

This permanent beta label has become very meaningful to us. It's about bridging brains, tech and culture. Somewhere in this domain lie the solutions for the problems that we are confronted with today. 'Nooit Af' is about the maker scene, the DIY-movement, the significance of 3D printing. Most people can't grasp the implications of this or have never given it any thought. Only when I'm physically in front of them with a piece of Lego I just printed myself, when I tell them the first 3D printed MRI scanners are already a fact, it starts to dawn on them.

I get what Philips is doing: management has concluded that most money is spent on healthcare in the Netherlands, so they started making products that would qualify them as recipients of this money. But it won't be long until we can make MRI scanners that are better, faster and cheaper ourselves. But it would require of us that we disclose this field. It's not our responsibility to provide for Philips. With the emergence of Quantified Self, another movement in which Aslander is involved, healthcare will experience even more significant changes, he says. 'The rise of powerful, cheap sensors that are used in smartphones will cause an extreme data explosion in the years to come, which will give us unprecedented insights in the human body and all environmental factors: nutrition, lifestyle, smog, decibels. We may find out 10,000 times more about the human body than ever before.

And all this information is not just going to be owned by a couple of pharmaceuticals: research is getting cheaper all the time as well. Soon you'll be able to conduct a large scale study against very low costs as an amateur, which will lead us to discover ground-breaking things. This is extremely good news.

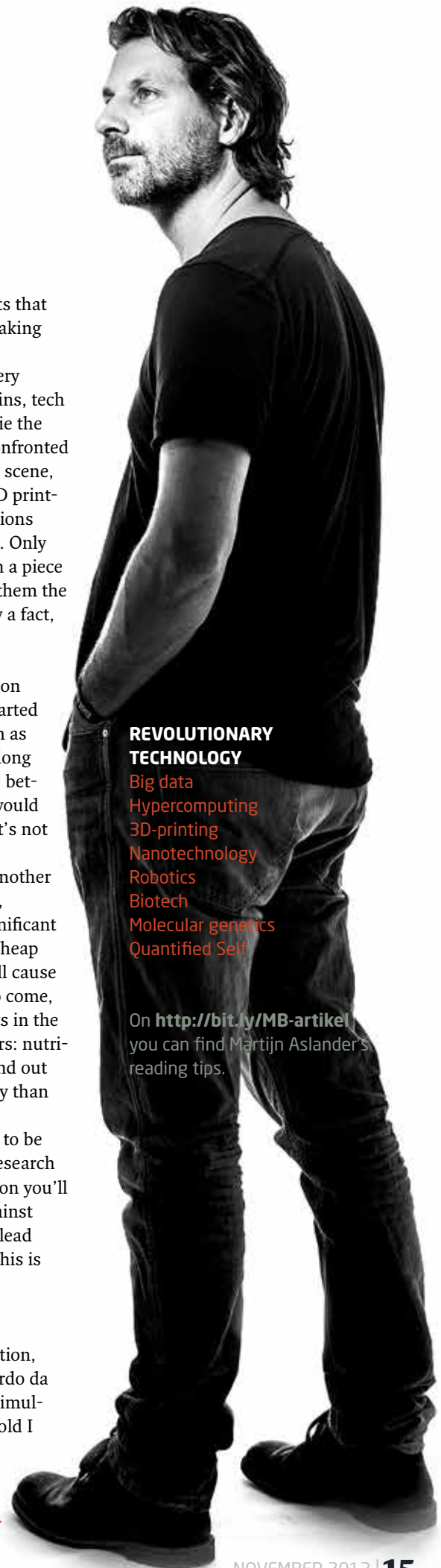
THE NEW RENAISSANCE

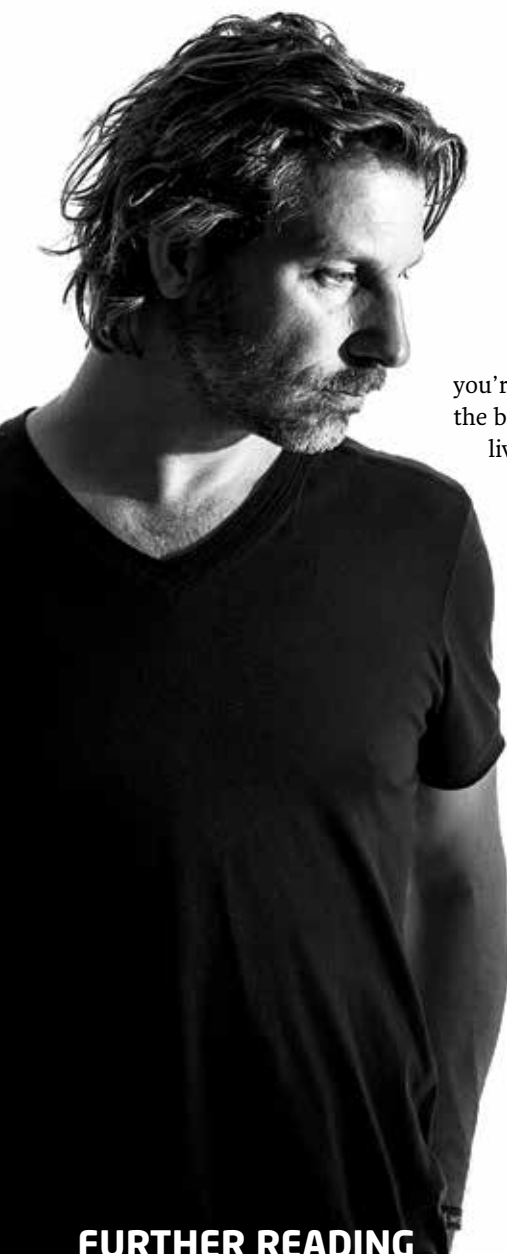
When asked about his sources of inspiration, Aslander has a surprising answer: Leonardo da Vinci. 'He was doing all kinds of things simultaneously, too. When I was fifteen years old I read a book on Da Vinci and I remember thinking: That's what I want, too. I don't want to focus on one subject, I want to find out what happens when >>

REVOLUTIONARY TECHNOLOGY

Big data
Hypercomputing
3D-printing
Nanotechnology
Robotics
Biotech
Molecular genetics
Quantified Self

On <http://bit.ly/MB-artikel> you can find Martijn Aslander's reading tips.





you're working with art, technology, inventions and the body at the same time. Let's face it; we have been living in a new Renaissance for roughly ten years now. We're dealing with an incredible convergence of knowledge and information.

In the Middle Ages the church had monopolized knowledge. If you didn't agree with the Pope your head would roll. This changed in the Renaissance, when the De'Medici family had gathered so much power that they could withstand the pope. With this freedom and money they could bring artists like Da Vinci and Michelangelo together in Florence. This was the beginning of incredible prosperity. Parallels with our current age are plentiful, claims Aslander. But people have to be willing to shrug off the past in order to keep up with the pace at which things are changing. 'It's what another hero of mine, Seth Godin, says: 'It used to be about having stuff that other people didn't have. It allowed you to make new stuff. But nowadays it's about something else. *It might be your network and your connections that trust you, it might be your expertise, but most of all, I'm betting it's your attitude.*' I see all kinds of young people

doing things that we can't do, without experience of education, but with the right attitude. The tools are available for everyone, your attitude determines the difference you'll make.

Former Yahoo! head honcho Tim Sanders writes in his book 'Love is the Killer App': Learn as much as you can, as quickly as you can, and share your knowledge aggressively.' This is something hardly anyone does. Learning a lot, fast, and sharing it fanatically. 'Connect with the ones who share your values and connect as many of them with each other.' Not happening, either. 'And find the courage to express genuine emotion in the harried, pressure-filled world of work.' Show your emotions, speak out when you think something sucks. Give what you can easily give, because it will get you more. If you give away more knowledge, you'll get more in return. This is why I usually don't like books: you have to pay for them first and then they are going to tell you what they know. Just help someone who has a problem. The good ones will do something in return and the wrong ones, well, you just don't help them again. ¶

FURTHER READING



NOOIT AF
Martijn Aslander,
Erwin Witteveen
Paperback, 166 pages, 1st
edition, 2013, Van Gorcum
9789023251163
€ 18,00



**EASYCRATIE - DE
TOEKOMST VAN WERKEN
EN ORGANISEREN**
Martijn Aslander,
Erwin Witteveen
Paperback, 166 pages, 1st
edition, 2010, Van Gorcum
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**175 LIFEHACKINGTIPS
OM PRETTIGER EN
EFFICIENTER TE WERKEN**
Martijn Aslander, e.a.
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edition, 2013, Van Duuren
Management
9789089650818
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Erwin Witteveen, e.a.
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Van Gorcum
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Voor u geselecteerd!

Managementboeken van Kluwer



De Connected Company

De wereld is veranderd
en Dave Gray laat zien hoe

Om gelijke tred te houden met de snelle kritische klant - *connected customers* - van vandaag moet je bedrijf een *connected company* worden. Dat betekent dat je je nauw verbindt met medewerkers, partners en klanten. Connected company's zijn in het voordeel: ze leren en bewegen sneller dan hun concurrenten. Terwijl andere bedrijven risico's analyseren, grijpen zij kansen. Terwijl andere bedrijven geïsoleerd werken, verbinden zij zich aan een netwerk van mogelijkheden en breiden zij hun invloed uit.

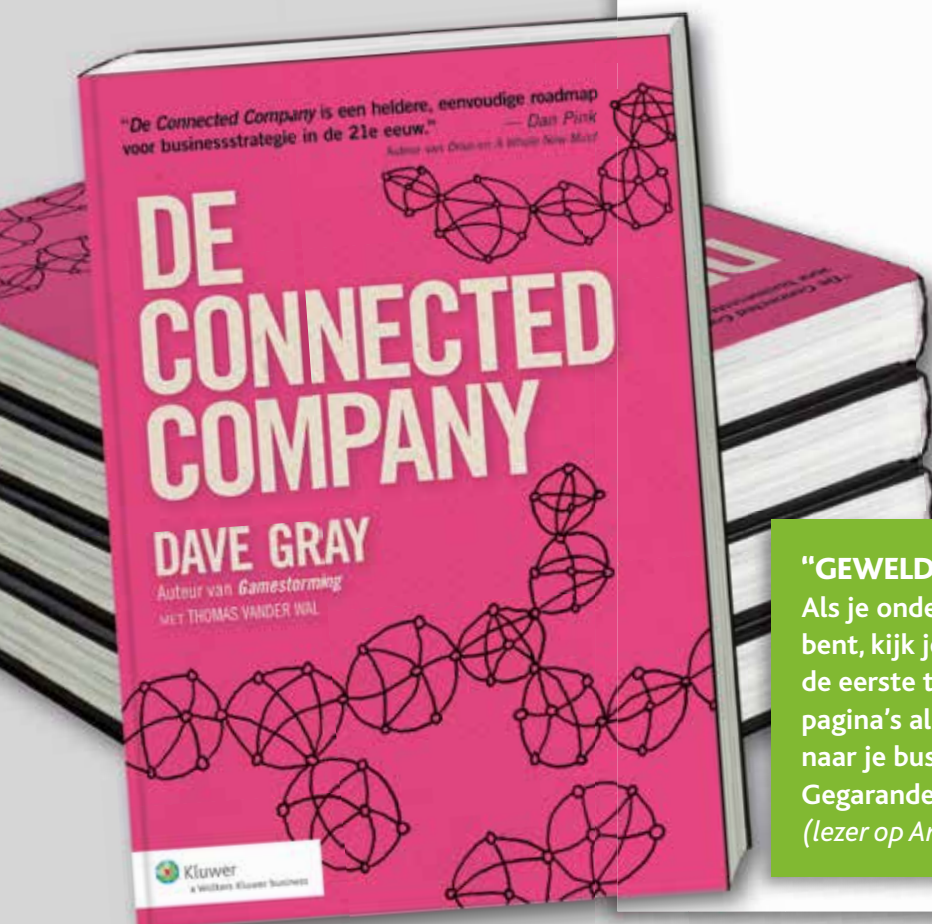
In *De Connected Company* onderzoekt Dave Gray wat deze bedrijven doen, hoe ze het doen en waarom het werkt. En hij laat zien hoe jouw bedrijf dezelfde principes kan gebruiken om zich aan te passen en succesvol te zijn.

Dave Gray
in samenwerking met Thomas Vander Wal

€ 32,00

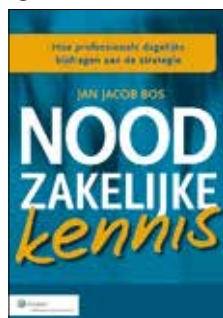
"GEWELDIG

Als je ondernemer bent, kijk je na de eerste twintig pagina's al anders naar je business. Gegarandeerd." (lezer op Amazon)



Noodzakelijke kennis

Dit praktische boek laat zien dat kennismanagement anno 2013 geen theorie is, maar een tool voor managers en professionals om de strategie met succes uit te kunnen voeren.

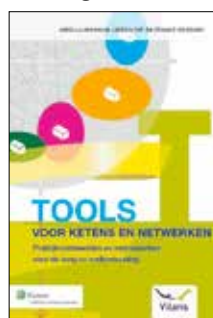


Jan Jacob Bos

€ 23,50

Tools voor ketens en netwerken in de zorg

Voor iedereen in de zorg die de samenwerking in ketens en netwerken wil vormgeven of wil verbeteren. Een boek vol praktijkvoorbeelden en tools.



Mirella Minkman,
Lidewij Vat,
Stannie Driessen

€ 21,00

Gamestorming

Spellen voor vernieuwers en veranderaars

Een boek dat je handvatten geeft om professioneel games te spelen en de juiste regels te hanteren. Er staan maar liefst 80 games beschreven! Oefeningen om de creativiteit te stimuleren om zo een probleem op te lossen.



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