



make a
difference

MAGAZINE

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FOLLOWUP STORIES ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THE EVENT

WHAT WAS SET IN MOTION?

THE POWER OF THE PARADOX

SAVE THE DATE



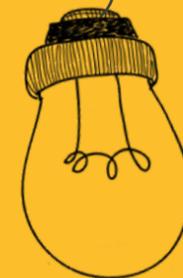
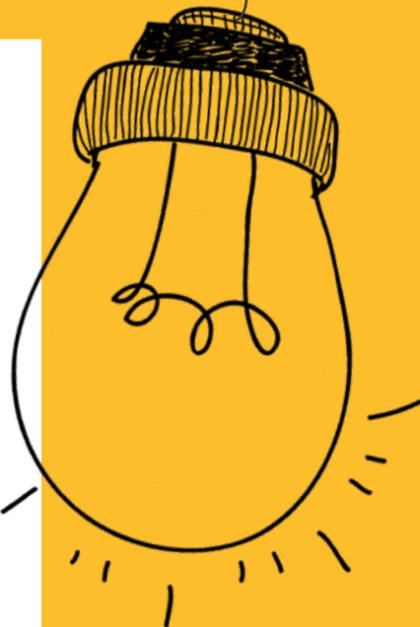
Last May, we organised our Make A Difference Event: MADE.

Some 250 people from varying backgrounds came together for an Appreciative Inquiry Summit of 2,5 days to explore how they could contribute more to flourishing people, communities or even a flourishing world.

Our [first magazine](#) on MADE captures some of the energy and experiences. And also outlines our main ideas behind the Summit.

In this second magazine we share some followup stories about what happened after the event. What was set in motion? What ideas came to life? How did the inspiration from the different encounters transform into concrete practices? Appreciative Inquiry in its very nature is [generative](#): the aim is to leave people not only with new ideas but also with the energy and the social network to bring those ideas to life. Before the summit, we were very curious as to what kind of initiatives would spring from it. Not only within our company Kessels & Smit, but also in our wider network of people who attended. We couldn't really predict it. Four months later, we now know a lot more and the curiosity remains. What more will happen? How will things unfold?

In this MADE magazine participants share some of the stories of what MADE brought them, and what initiatives they were inspired to take on. For some, the impact was on a very personal level, as you can read in the stories of [Muriel](#) and [Christophe](#) and the [blog of Teus](#). Others translated their summit experience to their work, like [Michael](#) and [Geert](#) did. The stories of [Wilja](#) and [José](#) are examples of initiatives born at the summit than continued afterwards. We also [explore](#) what the summit brought us as [Kessels & Smit](#), [The Learning Company](#).



How did MADE inspire us and provide us with new directions? An interesting common thread in all of the stories is the multi-faceted nature of the Summit experience: it was meaningful to people because it was never 'just' nice, or 'only' positive, but also confusing and sometimes difficult. And somehow, they made that work. So we included [an interview with Lenette](#), who is an expert on how to make such [paradoxes](#) productive.

And, finally, some people are already thinking of planning a follow up event next year: this magazine contains [an invitation](#) for who wants to join them in the organization.

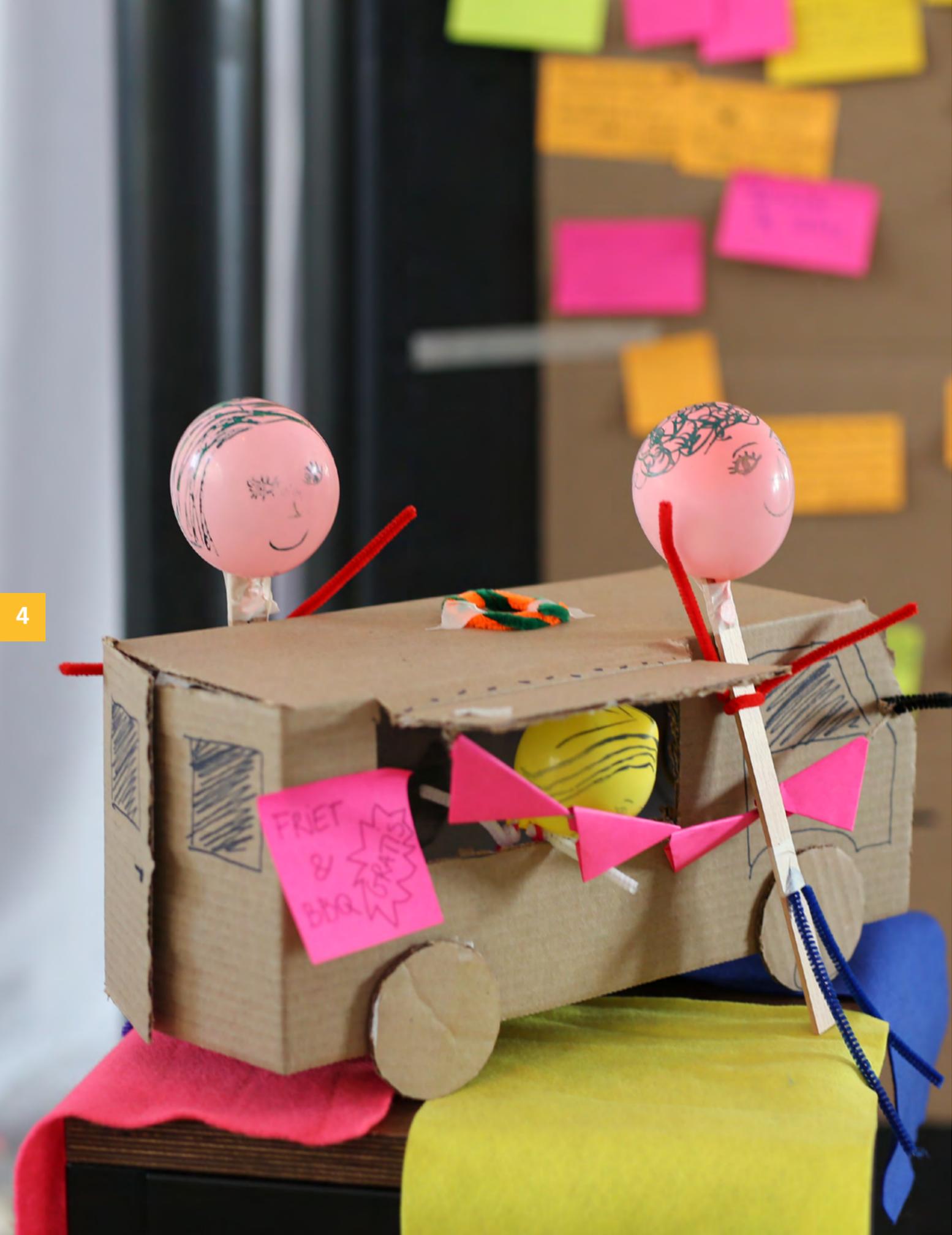
For us, it was a pleasure to collect stories and it helped us understand what the value of the meeting was. We hope that reading them will do the same for you. And that the Magazine itself will contribute to the outcome, and will spark new initiatives.

If you have a story of your own to share, please let us know! In a few months time, we'll create another magazine.

Enjoy reading,

Mara, Mariël, Katrien, Derk, Esther, Saskia, Luc, Joeri, Hanneke





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ABOUT GENERATIVITY AND YOUR MADE EXPERIENCE

6 Appreciative Inquiry is often associated with positivity. However, research suggests that it is not so much the positive, as the *generative* nature of an AI process that supports transformation of any kind. Ron Fry and Gervase Bushe describe it in their key note address to the World AI conference 2012 as: "The moment a connection happens that leads to more than a new idea or an insight. When the connection sparks actions. So that people don't wait for the next meeting, or for someone else to do something. They do something themselves. People start up a new business, try out a new approach, get other people together... That, to me, is the power of AI. It always sets people in motion. Few begin an AI summit looking for more work; nearly all leave having volunteered to new cooperative action." That is what we call 'generativity'.

TWO POWERFUL QUESTIONS, WITH A DIFFERENT EFFECT

In order to illustrate how it works, Gervase Bushe and Ron Fry performed a little experiment with their keynote audience by asking two questions: 'Tell me about your most positive, high point experience at any conference (when you felt happiest, proudest, most inspired, alive, joyful)?' and 'Tell me about the most provocative experience you had at any conference – when you felt most challenged (perhaps your thinking was upended, your values were confronted, your ideas were challenged, your emotions were provoked, or your choices were questioned by you).' The first question is aimed at seeking out and bringing you back to the positive emotions you experienced, whereas the second is trying to bring you back to situations that challenged your values or that created a new perspective. Gervase Bushe underscores the importance of the latter: it is essential to enable transformative action.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR MOST POSITIVE, HIGH POINT EXPERIENCE AT ANY CONFERENCE

TELL ME ABOUT THE MOST PROVOCATIVE EXPERIENCE YOU HAD AT ANY CONFERENCE – WHEN YOU FELT MOST CHALLENGED

HOW DO THEY AFFECT YOU?

You could test the effect of these questions yourself, by applying them to MADE. Could you answer them? And what effect do both questions and their answers have on you? Which one gives you more energy and/or ideas to start or continue to do something different? Bushe argues the relevance of the second question: those moments that challenge our beliefs really make a difference to us, and expand our thinking and thus our possibilities. Difficult moments in life generally are often the moments where change comes from, as long as we inquire into and appreciate these moments. Which also brings us to the difference between 'appreciating' (everything can be there, wholeness, looking for energy and life) and 'positivity' (high point experiences, positive emotions, success stories). Both are used in Appreciative Inquiry, depending on the question and the preference of the practitioner.

ENHANCING THE GENERATIVITY OF AN AI PROCESS

7 So how could you enhance the generativity of an AI process? Gervase Bushe invites us to keep generativity in mind in every design step of an AI process. For instance by trying to formulate an affirmative topic that functions as a 'generative metaphor', the topic itself helps you to see things in a different way. At the summit our topic was '*radical* connectedness'. Did that already help you to see things differently during the summit itself or afterwards? Another thing you can think about is crafting 'generative questions' for people to talk about. That is: questions that are surprising, touch the head and heart, create a perspective shift and create a connection between the people who are in conversation about that question. This will help to enter into generative conversations and create generative action afterwards, because if people feel connected to each other and the topic early in the process, they will most likely want to get into action later as well, Bushe argues.

(see also: <http://www.kessels-smit.com/en/b1430>)

CREATING SPACE FOR CRITICAL SOUNDS

Michael de Bont, one of the Kessels & Smit consultants, had an unexpected experience at the Summit. Together with others, he discovered ways of dealing with critical thoughts that helped to fully engage in the process. It was not a theme he had imagined to be a central topic beforehand. Not that he had very specific expectations, he entered the Summit mostly with a curious and open mind.

CONFUSION AND IRRITATION

The dominant experience of the first day was one of confusion: "I wondered what it was all about. I was very curious to learn about the AI process and tried to understand the flow of it and see where it would be headed. Seeing and experiencing a summit was actually my main focal point, much more than the topic at hand. But I couldn't grasp it and wondered what we were doing with this large group of people. I didn't find the focus in it and that both confused and annoyed me." During the second day, Michael met with some other participants who shared similar experiences and thoughts.

TURNING IT AROUND

Michael: "The good thing of what happened then is that we found space for our critical points of view. They were not a taboo, we could discuss and explore them together openly. It felt like an acknowledgement of our ideas and feelings. As if they were somehow allowed to be there as well". Michael knows himself to be an independent spirit: 'If the whole group decides to move in

one direction, I often get the irresistible urge to head the other way.' In itself that can trigger all sorts of reactions. The Summit provided a novel and welcome experience in this respect: "I have experienced first-hand that if negative or critical thoughts are allowed to be there, this feeling of recalcitrance, of wanting to fight or go 'the other way' evaporates. Making room for something that was actually very constructive. It was quite special to experience this so directly."

MAKING ROOM FOR CRITICAL SOUNDS: LIVING IT

Next to it being an experience with individual meaning for Michael, he and some of the other participants tried to translate it into lessons on how to effectively work on change processes in organisations. "Whenever we are in a process of change, there are by definition many different viewpoints and opinions. Some positive, some negative. But it is not always easy or 'allowed' to share critical ideas in the formal discussions and conversations – in the 'on stage' world. Leaving those exchanges to simmer in the 'off stage' conversations at the coffee machines and in the hallways. Where they do influence the actual change process, of course, but in an implicit and sometimes unpredictable manner. This always fascinates me."

Aware of their existence and influence, in his work as a change consultant Michael always explicitly looks for the off-stage conversations: what do people truly think and feel about the

change? And how can those feelings be dealt with productively? So, the idea that it is important to pay attention to different perspectives during a change process was not a novel insight in itself. Michael: "The difference for us was that we really lived it. We actually felt and experienced first-hand what happens if there is space to explore your critical sounds and ideas. If they can be there 'on-stage', as integral part of the process. The summit was a meaningful experience in that respect. We got to explore and learn what really works if you are in a process that you regard critically, or that even irritates you a little bit. We really used that learning space."

NEXT QUESTIONS

The whole experience left Michael motivated to work even more explicitly with the 'critical voices' in large change processes. "This is actually very relevant for one of my current projects. The proposed change meets with a lot of resistance in the organization - people are skeptical. My main challenge now is how to create room for these feelings and viewpoints in the on-stage meetings. I am already using some of the ideas we discovered during the Summit to design our next large scale intervention". It takes some getting used to for the project leaders and managers, who are not opposed to it, but haven't had Michael's first-hand experience of the constructive effect of allowing different sounds to be heard.





IMPACT OF THE SUMMIT

on us as Kessels & Smit,
The Learning Company

In order to stay true to ourselves and our purpose, we have reinvented us as a company for several times during our 40 year existence. The world of work and organisations, the consultancy profession, our business environment, we as a group of people who make up Kessels & Smit: all of that is in constant flux. And every once in a while, we need to re-asses what it is that we do, how we do it and why.

For the last two years, we have felt ourselves grow toward such a 'leap' again. We organized group meetings in which we reflected on questions like "What does it mean to do our job in organisational development and change at this time in human history?" and: "How may we contribute to a society that gets the best out of people and organisations?". We played with these questions during several internal brainstorm sessions, in inspirational workshops with external guests - we even 'hacked' ourselves.

The idea behind our Make A Difference Event was to take our inquiry to a different level by engaging with a larger group. Not random people but important professional friends from our Kessels & Smit network, who feel like like-minded spirits in the sense that they share a similar drive. We were curious to see what would happen when we shared our inquiry with people from different kinds of organisations and positions. And we hoped it would enrich both us and them. How? We didn't know yet...

In the first MADE Magazine, published shortly after the event, you could already read some first reflections about the summit: experiences, looking-back-and-forwards, first post-summit initiatives. And we shared how we tried to sustain the generative dialogue within our own company. In this article, we'd like to share how the story unfolded. How did the summit help and inspire us in our quest?

WORKING DAYS AS PIVOTAL POINT

Each year, by the end of August, all international Kessels & Smit colleagues join for a couple of days to work together. This moment, right after the summer breaks, always feels like a logical time for us to look forward to the coming year. To make plans together. What will be everybody's focus? Where do we see connections between all those ambitions? It's the closest we ever get to formulating a 'company strategy', which for us basically is the sum total of all of our individual and small group ambitions. There is value in this synchronized focusing process. In helping each other articulate our ambitions, we become much closer as a team. Crossovers and group plans emerge. And we are able to see patterns which 'lift' the whole from 'a set of loosely coupled dreams' to a joint direction.

So for us, it seemed logical to use the working days as a pivotal point in our collective inquiry.

After the choice to 'pull in' the outside world during MADE, we now felt the need to turn inwards. To organise our time and space in a way that would allow us to give meaning to everything we had heard, seen, and experienced before, during and after MADE. So we organised a reflective and meaning-making retreat.



As a starting point colleagues interviewed each other on how they had gone through the last 1,5 years of 're-inventing K&S' - with the MADE summit as collective highlight. What (deliberate or unplanned) experiences and discoveries about their purpose in work did they have during this time? And what did these moments teach them about their own purpose but also about where Kessels & Smit as a group is headed – bearing in mind that we all are K&S. The group's purpose does not exist outside of us. *We are the company.*

On the morning of the second day, we formed a big circle with 50+ colleagues, inviting everyone to read their personal purpose out loud. It was a light but at the same time intense moment. Somehow it sometimes felt as an 'affirmation' – with the special mixture of pride, confidence, care and vulnerability that comes with that. Though everyone used their own words and the purposes differed in topics but also in levels of concreteness and abstraction, the link with our MADE summit and its affirmative topic was in many ways ever-present. Our colleagues' personal purposes were all in some way or another linked to "radical connectedness for full-spectrum flourishing at every level from personal to community".

Maybe this would have been the 'logical' moment to summarize all the personal statements into one common purpose: something like an organisation's mission statement. However, that is not where we went. Trying to summarize the richness would feel artificial and might even lead us to lose some of the colorful spectrum we discovered. Instead we chose to trust something else that we felt, standing there in the big circle: the mutual desire to realise all of these purposes *with each other*. The authentic differences and variety in focus, in tone of voice, in type of energy were exactly what made it attractive for everyone to have the others around. It made us think of the African proverb: *'If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.'* We all sensed that as a group we stand a greater chance of realizing all of these individual purposes. Because of our familiarity AND because of our differences. By the way, we didn't even say this out loud. The experience was natural, brief and spoke for itself.

So, we proceeded to investigate how we all could work on our purposes. Making plans. Exploring ideas. Several new initiatives were born. And again, we could see how the Summit had helped us find new avenues to work on our greater goal.

NEW PATHS TO EXPLORE

In the initiatives that were formulated during the Working Days, two patterns emerged that are different and relatively 'next level' to us. It is clear to us that both were boosted by MADE.

1 The first is that we seem now more than ever focused on having an impact on society with our work. This was never far from our minds, but our main focus was on supporting individuals, companies and institutions with development questions (and through them, contribute to society). Now, several groups have identified strategic challenges on a community level that they want to contribute to. Complicated and even chaotic questions in our society call for new ways of collaboration between stakeholders and new ways of inquiry and action learning. Several colleagues have engaged themselves explicitly with such types of questions.

2 A second finding is that we now not only position ourselves as consultants and partners for someone else's questions and goals, but also as *initiators*. Somehow MADE made us aware that we can also host space for inquiry, connection and learning – an option that we can use to enhance topics that matter to us. So, some of us are brainstorming about creating new Summits on specific topics; another group of colleagues is working on plans to support worthwhile start-ups within our own network: boosting our entrepreneurship – which has always been a strong root next to our consultancy role. And so on...

In both cases, it's like MADE has implicitly strengthened both our ambitions and drive in these areas as well as our self-confidence: we have a lot to learn but also something to offer... This somehow lowers the threshold and provides the courage that is needed to fully explore these paths of work.

And now...? The inquiry goes on. It's not like we have a brand new boxed 'mission' or 'strategy'. We'll continue our search. On a different level. But we'll do it while working. With our varied array of personal purposes as our compass. And the energizing and encouraging experience of MADE in our backpockets.

CREATING ROOM FOR 'THE COUNTER-FORCE'

Jose Kruger works at the Dutch Food & Consumer Products Safety Authority. When talking about her experiences at the Summit, the first thing she mentions is how touched she was by meeting so many new people in Rotterdam who share an ideal that is very close to her own heart: trying to make the world a little better. 'It was an absolute joy to work in such a big group of people committed to that same purpose.'

During and after the Summit, José and a few others started an initiative focusing on what they call the 'story of the counterforce'. What do they do now and why do they do it?

INVITING PEOPLE TO TELL THEIR STORY

Jose: "I always try to set a focus on development and growth, and I make a conscious effort to create a positive atmosphere. But no matter how hard I work at that, I always meet people with a different view... People who do not want to focus on development, but rather on results, performance, facts and figures. Who are not enthusiastic about the new steps or who just don't agree with my ideas. As a result they often (inadvertently) smother or slow down progress. As a manager, I have to deal with this kind of 'counterforce' in my team. And it leaves me with the intriguing question: how I can make room for the kind of energy and atmosphere that I want to create while *at the same time* dealing with those team members who have a different focus and are also part of the system? That is the topic we wanted to explore further."

During the summit José and her group jointly came to the conclusion that it is vital to make the 'story of the counterforce' explicit and include it in the discussions on change. Their assumption is that, in order to create room for development, it is essential that people with different or opposing viewpoints are also able to tell and share their stories. To prevent a 'counterforce' from becoming downright disagreement or resistance.

EXPERIMENTING WITH OPEN MINDED LISTENING

So what did José and her colleagues do? Part of the group started a deliberate practice of listening without judgement. José: "We had exchanged at the summit how open-minded listening is actually far more tricky than you might think. Subconsciously, you almost always start leading the other's story. Even when you ask so called open-ended questions, you are influencing the other. So we formulated the solid intention to ask *only* for explanations, elaborations and examples. This turned out to be a very interesting experiment. People with whom we engaged in these kinds of conversations felt very invited to share their story. One person even told us: I have actually never told this story to anyone before today.'

NEXT STEPS

The next level question for José and her group is now: 'How do we create room in organisations for people to share their critical stories and points of view without being labeled as 'unwilling', 'negative' or 'resistant'? How can we organize this and make it a more common practice?' All participants are momentarily experimenting in their own context with creating the right setting for such conversations. In December, the group will meet again to share experiences and learnings. Like true action researchers.

It is a meaningful inquiry for José: "Life is not about making money, it is about you and me. About what drives us and how we can help each other to make progress on what matters to each of us. If we are able to connect on each other's drives and intentions via personal and meaningful conversations, in the workplace or at home, we can already make a difference. You don't have take on the whole world. Small steps count."





KAPA fix
Marcel van der Haan

KAPA fix
Anne Marie van de Wief

KAPA fix

KAPA fix

KAPA fix



A NEW CAREER STEP

“What kind of impact do I seek with my work?” – that question was top-of-mind for Christophe Lambrechts, coordinator Organizational Development at STRAMIEN Architecten, when he came to MADE. At the time, he still worked as a Commissioner for the Flemish Scouting Organisation but was already looking for a new job. After more than 6 years, it was time to make a new step. The personal impact question was particularly relevant to him at that time of reorientation in his career. Now, a couple of months later, we interview Christophe about his question and how it evolved during and after MADE, and how the Summit helped him find a job that fits his values and ambitions....

AT WHAT LEVEL DO I WANT TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY?

“My personal inquiry at the time of MADE was how and where I could have an impact with my work. At which level do I want to contribute? And how? Where can I have a positive influence? Those were questions that were very much alive for me. A key question in that respect was: where does change start? Can any individual, or individual initiative, make a meaningful difference, or do you have to work at a systems level? And to what extent can I take responsibility for changing things in a system if I am part of it - where do I see limits to my personal responsibility? When I drove back to Belgium, after the summit, I came to the conclusion that the world is too large to change on my own, but only focusing on my own district is too limited for me. So I chose Vlaanderen as my preferred playing field.”

IT'S NOT THE METHOD

Before visiting the summit, Christophe's expectations were very much focused on AI as a method: the steps, the interview techniques. “I knew about Appreciative Inquiry but hadn't experienced it yet myself. I was curious to see how it would work out in practice. In that sense, MADE was a bit of a sobering experience, in the sense that I found that it was not so much the method itself that leads to profound results. The inspiration comes from the process; the connections with other people, the variety of interactions”. The many inspired conversations with other summit-participants helped Christophe to make meaning of his question on personal impact.

THE OTHER SIDE OF RADICAL CONNECTEDNESS

One moment during the summit stood out for Christophe – because it was so confronting. “During the first day of the summit, there was a guy at our table who didn't show up the next morning. We continued as a group - but I kept feeling that I walked on with a little stone in my shoe.... We talked about taking care of other people and making an impact in society while at the same time we didn't succeed in connecting with this particular group member. I found that ironic and compelling. It made me all the more aware: processes of inclusion and exclusion happen all the time, even if we explicitly don't want them to”.

MEETING LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE...

On the whole, the summit left Christophe realising that he is not the only one seeking to have an impact on society and wondering how to make an actual difference. Realizing he is not alone was a powerful notion: “While applying for jobs, I often found myself confronted with other people and their different mindsets. Topics like social responsibility and sustainability are very important to me but I know it's not like that for everybody. Even more: I find that most organisations only get involved with societal issues in a very restricted way”. Not finding many organisations contributing to a change that in his eyes is inevitable was disheartening to him. In that sense, the summit restored his hopes and energy because he met so many like-minded people with similar questions: “It is already happening, there are good examples, and moreover: more people are looking to make a contribution, just like me. In that sense, the summit was a good example of a positive impact effort in itself”

DIFFERENT WORK, DIFFERENT BEHAVIOR

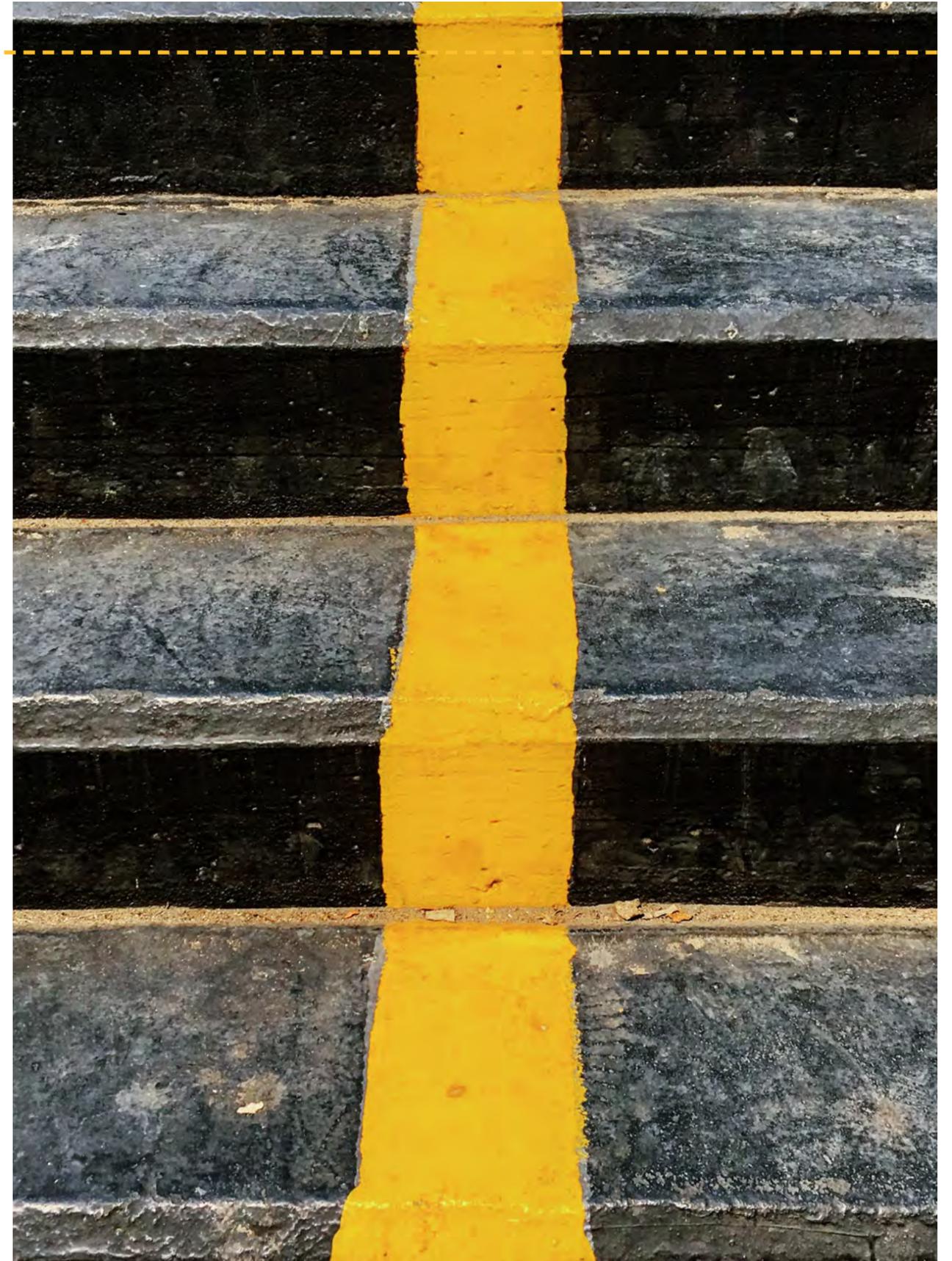
Strengthened by the realization that there are many other people out there who share his values and ambitions, Christophe changed his way of job hunting. He cast a wider net and went on to investigate how he could use his talents to further the development of Vlaanderen. “Getting a grip on that question was definitely a direct result of the discussions I had at MADE. I left with the firm resolution to have impact on our regional level. It changed the type of jobs that I applied to.” The conversations and people at the Summit gave



TAKING ONE-ON-ONE
RELATIONSHIPS AS A
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him the courage to apply for the job that he now holds.

“If all goes well, in my new job I will work with city councils on mobility issues. The level of connectedness and ‘team spirit’ of the civil servants involved will definitely be part of my focus. I am aware that any network that works on a specific topic will need a certain amount of connectedness and team building in order to realise a meaningful, energized process. But it shouldn’t be so strong as to exclude and alienate people.” His experiences at MADE make him all the more aware of this vital aspect of group work. He intends to use techniques and habits that he already uses with groups, but was also struck (again) by the power of the personal exchange. “The concept of MADE: taking one-on-one relationships as a basic building block and moving on from there is something I definitely intend to use more. Just talking for a few minutes in a one-on-one conversation already makes you reach so much more depth in your inquiry than brainstorming with twelve people for half an hour. As a process facilitator you can use that fundamental basic block of two-person interaction to expand and broaden the number of relationships and thus build a strong network.”





Living and working according to the four seasons

Wilja is one of the financial experts of Kessels & Smit, *The Learning Company*. During the summit, she participated in a group that explored the topic of 'living and working according to the four seasons'. Would such a way of life be more conducive to personal flourishing? Wilja: "I was immediately drawn to the metaphor, put forward by Arno Vansichen, of living more in tune with the seasons. Our lives are often so hectic: it seems we are always starting things up, making initiatives grow and prosper, developing new plans and ideas.... In that sense we live like it is always 'spring' and 'summer'. Whereas, 'fall' and 'winter' – as the times of harvesting and reflecting, taking a break and resting are far less present in our daily lives. The world is changing, people no longer take a 'winter sleep' in January because we have central heating, artificial light, air-conditioning et

cetera. However, we aren't built for this constantly fast pace and on-going energy of creating, acting and developing. We need time to slow down and rest as well."

PASSIONATE ABOUT SEASONS

Six people (including Arno) of the group of eight that Wilja worked with at the summit explored exactly this question: What would it be like to live and work more according to the four different seasons? They worked during the summit, and continued afterwards. We interviewed her right after the group spent a '24 hours' together in nature.

"It was very special to be together for such a long time. With six people I hardly knew! A little weird and exciting in a good way. Beforehand, we had read the book of Jaap Voigt on living with the seasons, and interestingly enough, each of us turned out to have different interpretations of the book. The weekend helped us all to explore and understand the thinking of Jaap Voigt more thoroughly."

DISCOVERIES

Wilja was very curious beforehand. "Nature can bring a lot of valuable insights...For me personally the topic of adapting my work and live to the season of the year is attractive because my burnout taught me the importance of taking time out and rest. But what does that mean, how can I do that? These questions are relevant to me. On

top of that, my boyfriend is a farmer, and I was curious to learn more about 'farm life' that is all about working with seasons."

What did Wilja learn from the experience? "I discovered my work has an odd rhythm, not at all in line with nature and the different seasons. I work in finance. Most of our work has to be done in December and January, at the closing of the fiscal year. So I am extremely busy at a time of year that should actually be a time of rest and reflection. A challenging question for me is: How can I still honour the seasons, given the fact my work requires lots of time and attention in Winter?"

FOUR SEASONS IN ONE WEEK

"The four seasons are present in a year, during a day, but for me also in a workweek. I work three days a week, and subconsciously I live my workweek according to the rhythm of the



seasons. This feels really good. On Monday I start quietly and prepare myself for the rest of the week. Tuesday till Thursday I am actively working, these days symbolize Spring and Summer. Friday is reflection time, I deal with the 'loose ends' of the week. And the weekend is about taking time off from work and resting."

A GIFT, AND NEXT STEPS

"I am really happy that we put our summit-intention into practice. The peacefulness we experienced during our 24 hours together was really beautiful: we were silent, listened to each other....it felt like a present we gave to ourselves."

The next step now is to reflect for ourselves, on a personal level, how we want to continue with this theme. We agreed to see each other again in Springtime, to spend time together and continue our conversation. For me it's valuable to stay connected in some way or another to inspire each other how to live and work with the seasons, read about it, deepen our understanding and experiment. For us as a group the question is if we want to make this initiative bigger in the future. And if we want to scale it up, what is needed? How can we make this happen? Do we want to? Time will tell.

A group of five people is walking away from the camera on a dirt path covered in fallen brown leaves. The path is flanked by tall trees with green foliage. The people are dressed in casual outdoor attire. From left to right: a man in a dark hoodie, a woman in a black jacket, a man in a light purple sweater, a woman in a dark jacket, and a man in a bright green jacket. The scene is set in a forest during autumn.

WHAT WOULD IT
BE LIKE TO LIVE
AND WORK MORE
ACCORDING TO THE
FOUR DIFFERENT
SEASONS?

DISCOVERING THE POWER OF RADICAL CONNECTEDNESS

For Muriel Bruynooghe, one of the younger Kessels & Smit consultants, MADE presented an unexpected breakthrough on a personal level. Her big take-away was the insight that radical connectedness asks for nothing more than giving it your all in any personal interaction. Getting involved without holding back. Muriel: "Before the summit I often did not feel totally connected. Neither with myself, nor with the people around me. It's not that I felt isolated - I did experience partnership and collegiality. But the summit was an eye opener in the sense that it made me experience that deeper levels of connectedness are possible in the workplace. Other people already thought of me as a strong person, but I didn't feel strong... I was always wondering what other people thought of me, questioning and second-guessing myself. The summit really changed me in that respect. I am more open, dare to show my own doubts and insecurities. Paradoxically *that* makes me feel stronger." Muriel's account echoes 'the power of vulnerability' that Brene Brown speaks about.

RADICAL CONNECTEDNESS IN ONE SINGLE MOMENT

Of course, the interesting question is what caused this breakthrough to happen during MADE? "Well, I guess some things just 'clicked' then and there. Several thinking processes that were already in motion got intertwined and together they caused a shift in thinking. It was a process, that came to a tipping point.' That being said, there is one conversation in particular that was very important in the whole process. "I really had

a moment of 'radical connectedness' with one of the other participants. The way in which we talked about stuff... very open, very pleasant.' Another key moment happened during the final presentation. "I sang part of a song. Singing is something that I really like to do, but I don't really think that I have very beautiful singing voice. At that moment however, I put those thoughts aside and stepped out of my comfort zone. That was a great experience. I had forgotten how much energy you get from doing that, from breaking free."

FROM BABY BIRD TO MATURE TEAM MEMBER

The realization that all it takes to feel truly connected is the courage to step in, to give yourself fully in an interaction, stayed with Muriel after the Summit. "I now know that just being 'me' is enough. That enables me to connect more freely and thus more deeply. With myself, with colleagues, with friends..." As a result, her self confidence has grown. "That is a wonderful feeling!" But there are more effects: "I am much more deliberate in my efforts to connect with others. For instance, I have met again with the other MADE participant with whom I had that special conversation.' But Muriel not only finds it easier to make new connections, she also feels a change in the way she acts in her existing relationships. "I literally see my friends more, and we engage in more profound conversations. They tell me that I have grown from being the most playful 'baby bird' of the group to the most mature one of us all."

ACTION

Her stronger sense of self-confidence and the positive experiences of stepping out of your comfort zone have also led to Muriel taking on new challenges in her work and private life. "For example: I have worked as a tour guide in Ghent, for a group of strangers. An amazing experience, I really loved to show them my beautiful town. A year ago, I would never have done such a thing. But now I think: 'I am the way I am, and I don't need to do 'extra' or prove anything.'" A development for which Muriel is truly grateful for she can see that it brings new opportunities. And which still takes a conscious effort. "Sometimes, when I am tired or when things are difficult, I have my weak moments and old doubts come creeping back. In those moments I deliberately think of my experiences at MADE, the people I met there, the conversations I had and the moment I stood singing on stage. And that helps."



CREATING ROOM FOR DIFFERENT VIEWS...

THE POWER OF THE PARADOX

Different participants experienced the summit in different ways. Even *within* one person there were different experiences. It was not *only* good, or *only* bad, *all the time* positive or *all the time* negative. People experienced energy *and* fatigue, it was easy *and* hard work, very connected and very lonesome... It was all of that at the very same time. In times of change, these kind of mixed experiences happen to us often: you are enthusiastic *and* sceptical, you are in need of clarity *and* focus, and you want space to let things emerge and just happen. Such a multi-faceted experience can be quite confusing. In those instances it can be meaningful and interesting to think in terms of paradoxes.

THINKING IN PARADOXES CREATES NEW PERSPECTIVES

A paradox can be described as a situation that seems contradictory and at the same time has a sense of truth. In ourselves, and in organisations, we often experience paradoxes. Two polarities from which we tend to favour one or the other. However, both have their value and truth, they are related and even inseparable. A paradox is therefore different from a dilemma: a moral issue where you have to choose. In a dilemma, it's either this, *or* that. When you think in terms of a paradox, you don't have to choose. You inquire both ends of the polarity and by doing so you discover something entirely new. It is not about choosing, it is about discovering new perspectives and possibilities.

An interesting exercise to explore what is meant by this is to reflect on paradoxes within yourself... No one is just 'one thing', we are made up of different qualities that sometimes are paradoxical: we are for example: playful and earnest at the same time, sensitive and rational... It is exactly the combination of seemingly juxtaposed qualities that makes us who we are... It gives a certain energy and depth to our characters. The same holds true for organisations. Kessels & Smit is purpose-driven and businesslike at the same time. Focused and chaotic. Transparent and mysterious... It is never just one thing.

“WHAT KILLS THE SOUL IN ORGANIZATIONS IS THE WISH TO SPLIT THE PARADOX, IGNORE ONE SIDE OR IGNORE THE TENSION THAT COMES WITH THE PARADOX.”

BRISKIN (1998)

SO HOW DOES THIS WORK?

Lenette Schuijt inspired us with her work on thinking in paradoxes. She says it isn't always easy to balance between two polarities. And according to Lenette, that is OK. In a paradox, let's say Focus versus Multiplicity, or Autonomy versus Connectedness, it is perfectly fine to sometimes fully choose for one of the two and provide all of your attention to it. As long as you are aware there is another side to take into account at some point in time.

STRUGGLING FORWARD

One of the groups at MADE focused on the theme 'The joy of struggling forward', that was about the paradoxical experience of struggling with what was happening during the summit and the desire to create a meaningful experience. Lenette: "The joy of struggling forward is a beautiful, and paradoxical, theme. It is about inquiring how struggling can actually be fun. If everything is smooth and easy, that's no fun either. Or the fun is more superficial compared to putting real effort in something. On the other hand making a struggle fun is also about celebrating small successes and steps forward".

HOW TO HANDLE A PARADOX?

Knowing how you deal with your personal paradoxes can be helpful when dealing with paradoxes you experience in your work, your organisation, or during an event like the MADE summit. According to Lenette, it helps to know your own typical way of handling paradoxical experiences. For the purpose of dealing with paradoxes in organisations, she has developed a very effective exercise, where the group first explores both sides of the paradox separately: how do they manifest themselves in our company? Then, after a brief exchange, they explore the benefits of each side of the paradox. After that: it is time to reflect on what is needed to let both sides of the paradox co-exist. What does it ask of us? How can you make room for both? We have done exactly this within Kessels & Smit and it was interesting to see how it made us understand our own dynamic better and truly appreciate the different voices and needs within our group. Thinking in paradoxes helps us to look appreciatively at all that there is, and thus it creates more space for inquiry.

PUTTING APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY INTO PRACTICE

Geert works as 'simplifier' at a large government organisation, supporting teams, projectgroups and management in their development or dealing with specific situations. After participating in the MADE summit he started using the Appreciative Inquiry approach in almost all of his projects. "I became aware that in my work I often seek for what's already working, and how this can be applied further. My own experience with AI during the summit was key to understanding the impact of AI. Not only on a cognitive level, but also on a emotional, intuitive, level".

EXPERIENCE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

During MADE Geert experienced the impact AI can have. On him personally and on a group of people together. "Some really cool energy sparked during the summit. As MADE participants we connected to one another and developed ideas quickly. As a group, this contributed to an unusually strong appreciation towards each other but also towards the process we were all part of.

SPEED UP OR SLOW DOWN

Another element that made the summit experience special for Geert was going through the AI process together with so many other facilitators and change professionals. "Reflecting on the design of the summit with other change-facilitators, and exchanging views on the process while being in the middle of it". At moments I felt: let's speed things up. But when that didn't happen, moments of deeper explaining and understanding emerged, which were perfect to connect and reflect.

AN APPRECIATIVE EYE

Now, months after the summit, Geert not only talks his colleagues into using AI as the daily-working-mode, he also uses AI in his own work every day. The effect he saw and experienced during MADE happens in his own projects. For example, Geert uses discovery interviews for team-development and sees people responding with enthusiasm and energy. "People easily speak about what's going well in their work. This helps them realize that they are already doing a good job in many ways, while at the same time creating a space to collectively explore how to improve by further applying these elements of success.

"After such a meeting I see motivated people that are aware of their strengths. They feel energized to improve things and look forward to get to work, instead of leaving a meeting with a long list of to do's they don't feel like doing at all. This is exactly this effect I experienced myself during the summit. I feel it's really cool how an AI way of thinking, looking and working can create such a different vibe".

I FEEL IT'S REALLY COOL
HOW AN AI WAY OF
THINKING, LOOKING
AND WORKING
CAN CREATE SUCH A
DIFFERENT VIBE





LIFE IS NOT ABOUT MAKING MONEY,
IT IS ABOUT YOU AND ME.
ABOUT WHAT DRIVES US AND HOW WE CAN
HELP EACH OTHER TO MAKE PROGRESS
ON WHAT MATTERS TO EACH OF US

José Kruger

KICKS FOR FREE

A BLOG BY TEUS LEBBING
A BRAND NEW STORY

‘WHAT WOULD YOUR WORLD LOOK LIKE IF
NO ONE WOULD TELL YOU WHAT TO DO?
IN THAT CASE IT WOULD BE TOTALLY
UP TO YOU TO CHOOSE YOUR OWN DESTINY,
SET YOUR OWN COURSE.
YOU COULD ONLY FIND YOUR PATH
BY CREATING IT, ONE STEP AT A TIME.
A PROCESS OF DISCOVERY AND LEARNING
ALONG THE WAY. ALONE AND WITH OTHERS’.

I wrote down these lines a couple of years ago during a change programme in the Dutch Police Force in which I engaged as an organizational journalist. People were developing new ways of organizing work, discovering –as they progressed - how much this challenged them to stop existing routines and familiar habits. They found out first-hand that real change requires the courage to let go of what is and start something new. To set out on a path of trial-and-error and exploration: trying out new things, sharing ideas and experiences and figuring out what works together, and what every individual might contribute.

Together with a group of organizational reporters, we tried to capture the experiences of the policemen and -women who were engaged in this change effort. We heard stories of their reluctance and cold feet to start a process without knowing exactly where it would take them... But we also captured many anecdotes that showed their power, resourcefulness, resilience and the energy that came from the process of stepping into the unknown together and making it work - somehow.

And exactly that is the main payoff of daring to engage in an adventure, we learned.

This half-forgotten lesson popped to mind, when I engaged with 250 other people from all over the world in the Rotterdam Cruise Terminal. It was at the start of the event, we were getting ready to engage in a three day process in which we would focus on how we all could make a meaningful difference in our work, our professional fields, our organisations, our world, even.

Normally, I tend to shy away from such grand themes and settings. Too big. Especially when I am supposed to leave my journalist notebook, pen and paper at home and actually engage as a participant. But this time, I had taken on the invite with both hands. Mainly because it came from Kessels & Smit, *The Learning Company*: a closely-knit network of consultants and facilitators who - like me - put their heart and soul into growth and development of people and organisations. Triggered by their 40-year anniversary they had decided to share their quest with other curious and learning-minded people.

Despite my initial enthusiasm, doubts and hesitations crept up on me as soon as I entered the building. ‘What am I doing here? Who are all of these friendly faces around me? And what do we have in common? We don’t even know each other.... what on earth might connect us, apart from this inspiring environment?’ Also: ‘Do I really have time for this? Do I really want to spend the next 3 days thinking of my own contribution to the future...?’

DARE TO ENGAGE IN AN ADVENTURE

I sort of tripped over my own need for predictability.

As a child, people could wake me up any time, night or day, and invite me to play or set out on an adventure. Did I somehow, somewhere lose my spontaneity? My ability to just 'step in' and go? Had the habit and routine of creating 'to do lists', setting SMART targets, contracting clear expectations and making plans gotten under my skin? Changed me somehow? These thoughts frightened me a bit. After all, Kessels & Smit had invited us to come and play for 3 days, to explore and use the space freely. And instead of jumping around, enjoying the freedom, I felt lost. A somewhat confronting realization.

And I realized something: while I often write about people dealing with the insecurities and discomfort inherent to change processes, I now found myself on the other side of my notebook, so to say: I had to go through it myself. Did I like it? No. But after a few uncomfortable hours, I decided to give myself a little kick-in-the-rear. I parked my phone, diary and critical inner voice and dove headfirst into the adventure.

I listened, talked, opened myself up and participated with all that I have in me. And I came to notice how many unexpected conversations,

touching moments and surprising insights originated in this room full of interested people. I saw the eagerness with which we all shared our stories about what drives us, our thoughts on how we hope to contribute, our beliefs. And I felt the energy, fun and feeling of interconnectedness that came from these exchanges.

Because that is the combined effect of attention, personal interest, curiosity and space: asking people what makes their heart sing immediately leads to genuine and insightful conversations. 'Kicks for free' that enrich our lives and that we can pay forward: sharing the insights, engaging in new conversations with others. I can't think of any catalyst for growth and change stronger than just this simple process.

As an interviewer and a writer I have been convinced of the value of people truly seeing and hearing each other... in fact: that is precisely why I founded A Brand New Story. But being in my off-duty role, I had to re-invent my own discovery, re-learn this old lesson that I already knew. And it is definitely my biggest take-away from these three days: the confirmation that all people, including me, don't have to think or act big and boldly to count. We all contribute. And more than grand concepts it is the little personal stories about dreams, aspirations, doubts and struggles

that make the difference. They ignite the energy and connectedness that may lead to valuable initiatives.

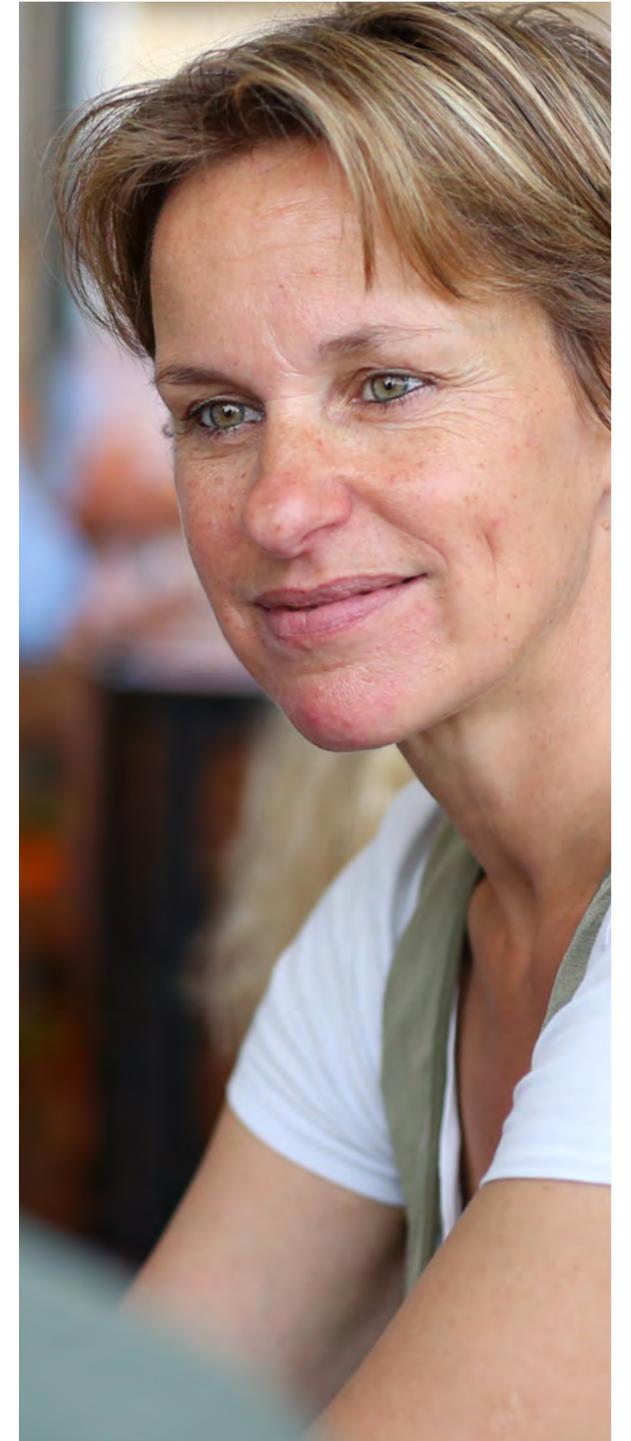
Because we didn't just leave with our heads full of stories, creative energy and new contacts, we also went home with feasible ideas and concrete designs. Not all new to 'the world', but definitely new to those who want to realize them and bring them forward.

And the Kessels & Smit initiators? They made their own reflection on the adventure: 'We didn't really know what we were getting ourselves into, but seeing what happened here already makes the event worthwhile to us. We have been able to create an 'in-between-space' together, were we could all think freely about what you leave behind, what you take with you to the future, what you hope and dream for in this world, and what you can or want to do to make it happen.'

In other words: a space to explore and investigate, without guidelines or instructions.

I am glad that I re-discovered for myself the very special sensation of joy that comes with creating and using such space.

This blog was originally posted in Dutch at Teus' website: www.abrandnewstory.nl





SAVE THE DATE FOR MADE REAL

RECONNECTING RADICALLY

We want to invite the whole MADE-community to reconnect and meet each other again on the 30th of May 2018, exactly one year after MADE. A moment to reconnect with each other and the ideas and initiatives that came out of the summit. By sharing stories of how your group initiative evolved after the summit... or by trying out a new approach that helps your summit initiative a step further... or by sharing your personal story of how MADE continues to resonate for you in your life...

We believe that we can achieve more as a MADE community than individually or in small groups, and that it is therefore valuable to get together again. Besides that, MADE REAL is an opportunity to 'take stock' one year later: what has happened since MADE, individually and/or in my group? What do I want to strengthen even more? And how might the MADE community support that?

We want to shape this event together, as a community. In the next MADE magazine we will ask you some questions to prepare the content for MADE REAL. For now we would like to ask you:

- Do you already have ideas about what you would find important for MADE REAL?
- Do you know or have access to a venue (preferably in The Netherlands) where we can host MADE REAL at a low cost?
- And most importantly: put the 30th of May 2018 in your calendar!

You can send an e-mail to made@kessels-smit.com.

