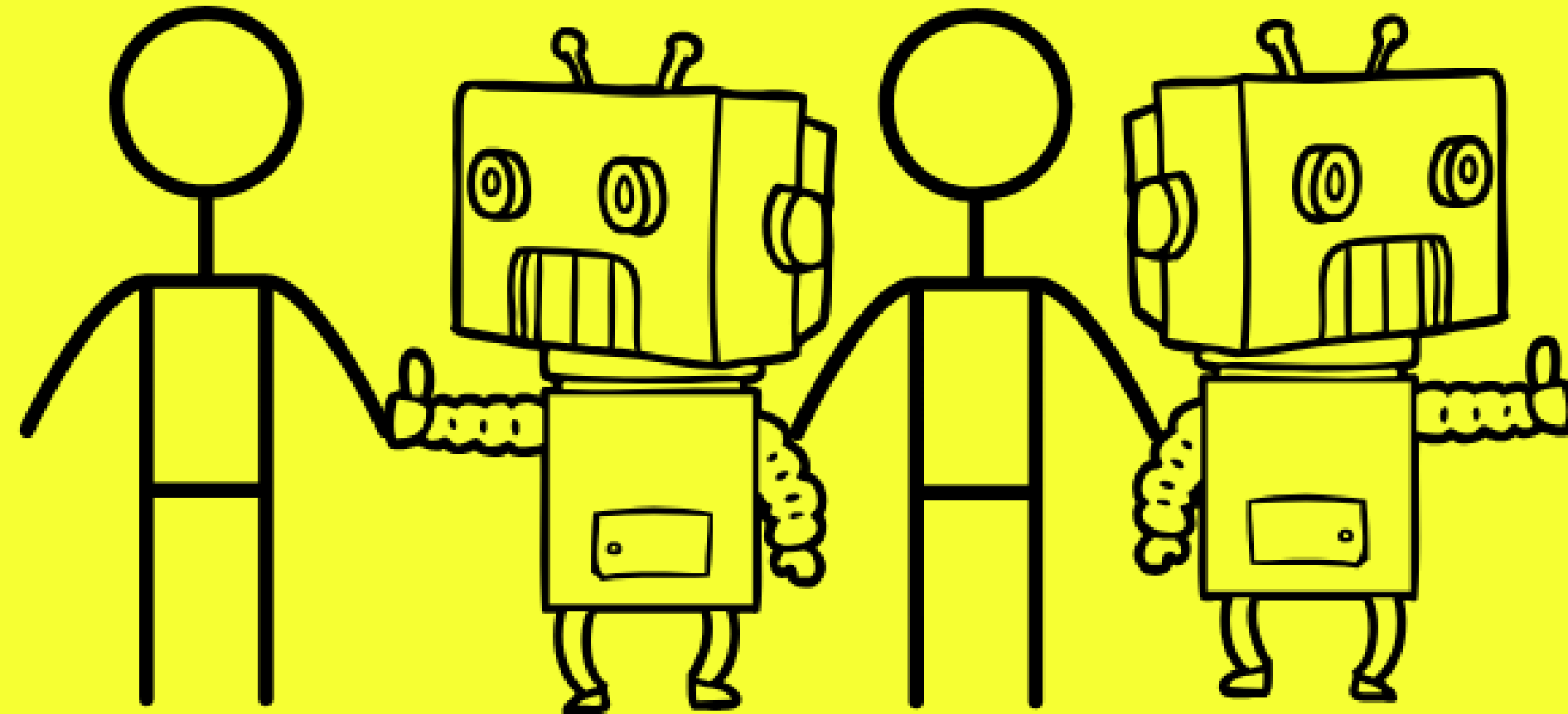


# TRULY CONNECTED IN A DIGITAL AGE



## A WONDERFUL WORLD

Our time is a wonderful time. Constantly things that seemed impossible suddenly become possible. As a result of the swift advancement of technology, our lives are changing rapidly. Everything is becoming a lot easier and more enjoyable. **In our home** automatic vacuum cleaners and lawn mowers take over tedious tasks. On vacation we no longer have to carry the heavy weight of the books we want to read, because everything is on the e-reader of less than 200 grams. A smart scale acts as a health coach with information and advice about your weight, fat and muscle mass. With a sensor on our head we can sleep deeper and better. For parents there are all kinds of digital tools to prepare their kids for the tests at school. You no longer have to help them, because they can train for tests by themselves, online. And for a friendly chat we have Alexa.



Also changes in the **workspace** are hard to keep up with. First it was all about the flexible office, with flexdesks and remote working. Now we're back in the office, but with soundproof headphones on to work concentrated amidst of all the distractions. After all, you can't work 'agile' on your own at the kitchen table. It requires a scrum board in the trendy office space. All tasks are neatly arranged in an app, so that you can tick off what you have done. Standard meetings are now 'stand-up' meetings and preferably as short as possible. For relaxation we make works of art on the windows with Post-it notes, clearly visible to the office workers in the building across the street. It has been proven the vitality, flexible working methods and having fun with your colleagues are good for the productivity, and thus that is the mantra for now. All for the sake of optimal performance. Better (i.e. cheaper and faster) than the benchmark, because that's what counts. Performance that's of course measured real-time.



In the field of **learning** there are many new opportunities. Although the evolution of traditional education is quite slow, innovation can't be stopped. Students no longer have to sit in the lecture hall, but they can follow the lectures from behind their laptop. Universities around the world offer free modules through various online platforms, such as Edx or Coursera, even providing official certificates. In India, in rural areas where schools are scarce, children 'educate' themselves, by using a community computer that asks questions and provides access to the internet. YouTube has become a teaching platform. You can learn how to build your own website, remove bathroom tiles, put on snow chains on your car and how to top up the boiler just by watching videos.



Another area of change is **healthcare**. If you go to the doctor, the doctor nowadays asks you what you think is wrong. Because he knows that you've been checking the internet before you visit him. You can make an appointment and order your medication with an app. Robots are becoming more common in the operating room. In radiology we make use of data enabling a much faster and more accurate diagnosis. New possibilities are created by custom-made prostheses and new skin for burns, thanks to 3D printing. And what about the robots that take over specific tasks in elderly care, such as Obi, a robotic arm that can feed the patient? At a time when qualified healthcare staff is becoming scarce, these robots are filling in the gap.



Innovation is also essential on an **economic level**. After all, innovation makes it possible to be more efficient and cheaper and thus to have a stronger competitive position. Automation can no longer be stopped. Digital transformation is a 'must' and preferably a rapid one. Artificial intelligence is promising. A great deal is expected judging the huge investments in this area. Whereas work first shifted to low-wage countries such as India, work is now done by computers or robots whenever possible. Simplifying processes enables automation of specific steps in a process or even the whole process. Human work becomes computer work.



Innovation in **politics** has the slowest pace. How come we still can't do our voting online? For now the levels of security and risks of hacking require manual work. But it won't take long before also in this area innovation will become visible. And maybe we'll then take a big leap. Maybe voting will no longer be needed because it will become possible to distribute real-time power, based on real-time voter sentiment.

Our lives are changing rapidly. We have come a long way, now being in the middle of the fourth industrial revolution. From steam engines, massproduction, electricity, communication & automation, this is the time of hyper-connectivity. Where everyone and everything is connected.

This is also the age of technological innovation. Innovations are unstoppable. There are no limits to what technology can do.

It makes life & business easier, faster, more efficient and it increases our wellbeing. But there are also challenges. We can deal with them once we learn to see them. Because the magic depends on something different. It is so obvious, we seem to forget:

It's **people** who give meaning to tech.

# FOUR CENTURIES OF PROGRESS

A flashback in time. In the 17th century the church had all power, but there was one man who firmly believed that people should learn to think for themselves. His name was René Descartes: 'Cogito ergo sum,' he said. 'I think, therefore I am.' And from that moment on power shifted from the church to the mind.

With this focus on the mind we do justice to the name of our being: Homo Sapiens literally means 'wise' man. But now - 400 years later - we need a new story. Because we are reaching the limits of our rational abilities. Technological progress - made possible thanks to our focus on ratio - brings us many things, but more and more we see the cracks appearing in the beautiful image of progress.

## A few facts

One in seven Dutch employees suffers from burnout complaints.\* Despite measures taken in recent years, the number continues to increase. "Thanks to digitization, flexible working, home working and therefore the 'always on mode', workload is increasingly becoming a mental burden," the NRC wrote in 2017 in a series of burn - out.

Seven out of ten students often experience performance pressure to very often, according to a recent survey\*\*. The SER (Social Economical Council) warns: The mental pressure experienced by students is worrying. Students feel more pressured and suffer from psychological complaints more often than working, non-working and retired people.

While loneliness is a chronic problem of all ages, young people up to the age of twenty-four are the most lonely with forty percent (!)\*\*\*.

\* Arbobalans 2018, TNO.

\*\* According to research in 2018 by Hogeschool Windesheim which lead to the 'Actieplan Studentenwelzijn'.

\*\*\* World Economic Forum Davos 2019



# RETHINK OUR POSITION: FROM HOMO SAPIENS TO HOMO CONEXUS

The development of technology is bringing us more than just smart solutions. We are on the verge of the intelligence revolution. The moment when computers and robots will outsmart us as humans, thanks to artificial intelligence.

We can't predict when this moment will come. Some experts expect that this will be reality within 20 years. According to others it may take a while longer, but one thing is for sure: that moment is coming: the moment of Singularity. And while we have valued and developed our intellectual capabilities, we have neglected the emotional, connecting and imaginative qualities of humans.

Will we - as human beings - be no more than the failing prototype of what we will perfect with artificial intelligence?

## **Back to the essence**

The ratio, with all its consequences, has a firm grip on us. The big question is: How can we break free and make way for our potential as human beings? How can we empower humanity instead of suffocate it? How can we shift from living only in our minds? How can we learn to see the difference between human 'doing' and human 'being'?

The answer is simple but challenging: by paying attention to the 'being' of people, the essence. And that's exactly where the shift to Homo Conexus comes in. Where we distinguish ourselves by our ability and our need to connect. With ourselves, with another and with the whole. To embrace the values that make us human, in which inclusion is not an exception, but a rule.

We are humans. We are social creatures,  
able of making a connection with each other.

Moreover, we are born to do that.

When we acknowledge the value of every individual,  
be inclusive, embrace our diversity,  
we can do amazing things... We can make magic happen.

Because in diversity we find our power.

# WE ARE MORE CONNECTED THAN EVER

There are 7.6 billion people on our planet of which 5.1 billion are mobile users, more than 4 billion have access to the internet and 3.5 billion are social media users. We spend 6.5 hours a day (!) online.

We are more connected than ever. But are we really? Our lives are changing rapidly, but how do we ensure that this change is also progress? How do we keep an eye on what's not in sight? How do we preserve humanity in an increasingly digital world?





# WE ARE MORE CONNECTED THAN EVER

But if we look at day to day reality, we are slowly losing our ability to connect. At the bus stop everyone is staring at their mobile. In the office space we sit behind our laptop all day with headphones on to make sure we're not disturbed by other colleagues. In a restaurant we no longer talk, but we take pictures of our food, share it on instagram and wait for the likes of our online friends. We are more connected than ever.

But are we really?



Pictures are by Eric Pickersgill from the series Removed.



## CONNECTING IS AN ESSENTIAL NEED

Maslow's pyramid is a well-known model in which human needs are arranged. Abraham Maslow published this model in 1943 in his book "Theory of Human Motivation". The highest level - in the model as we know it - is self-actualization. This level has a lot in common with individualism.

Individualism puts the rights of the individual above the interests of the community. More 'me', less 'we'. In a time where we are doing well as a society, it's no surprise that more and more people are motivated by this highest level in the pyramid. People are busy with themselves.

The Netherlands has an individualistic culture. And we are becoming more and more individualistic, according to CBS\*. We teach our children to think about themselves as 'me'. There's nothing wrong with it. But essential is that we are not alone in the world. We are social creatures. So how can self-actualization be the highest level?

Actually, the pyramid of Maslow doesn't end at the highest level as we know it. Maslow added a sixth level later on in his life. This level is called "self-transcendence"; transcend yourself. He wrote the following about it: " "Transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos". This was published in 1971, after his death.

This sixth level has never been generally recognized. It doesn't fit in our 'rational' image of the world. And so the pyramid remained at its original five levels.

Perhaps 'self-transcendence' is a bit of a fluffy phrase; too spiritual for our performance driven existence. But Maslow had a good point. By putting the "I" in the center of the universe, and also as highest aim, we will never reach the potential of humanity; the synergy when everything comes together, as a network. What makes humans unique is our ability to have a meaningful connection with ourself and our surroundings.

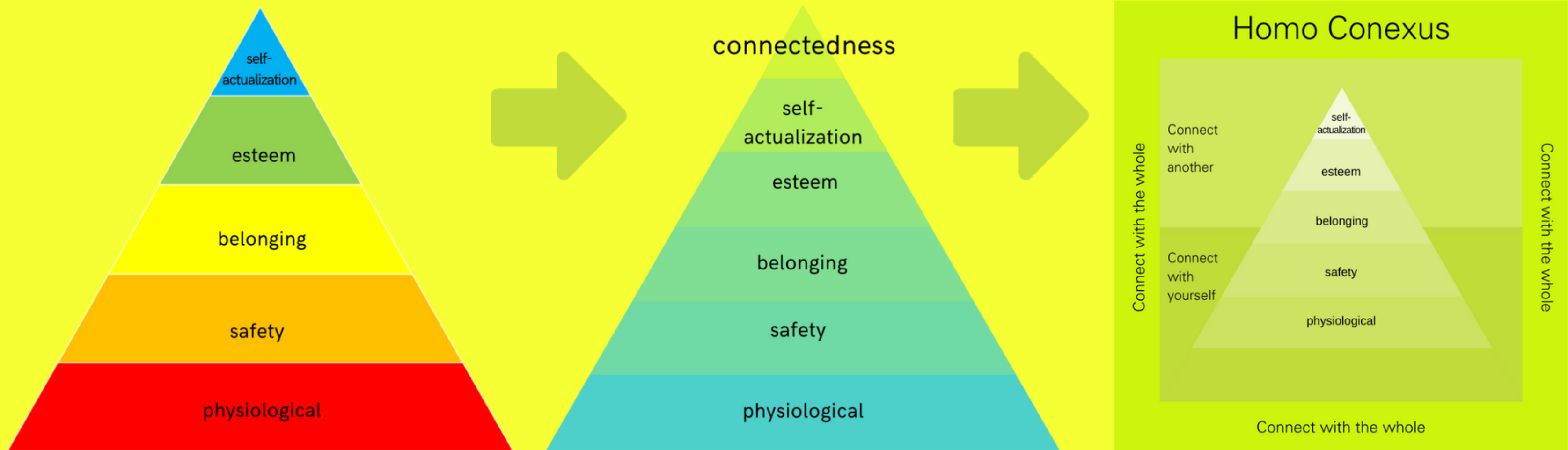
You may think that this is already covered by the third level 'belonging'. But belonging is not the same as being truly connected. We may belong somewhere, but we can still feel unconnected.

Now, with the knowledge of the sixth level that Maslow proposed in mind, being "connected" is actually a very suitable, down to earth way of putting things. Connected with yourself, with another and with the whole.

This - being connected - is what we need in our time. What sets us apart of the (potential) ability of a robot and what opens up possibilities to break free from the power of reason.

And then a final step in the evolution of the human needs. Because it's not a 'highest attainable' level. It's all-encompassing: the connection with yourself, with others and with the whole: Homo Conexus.

## EVOLUTION OF UNIVERSAL HUMAN NEEDS





Truly connected in a digital age

# HOMO CONEXUS

Homo Conexus is connected. With itself, with the other and with the whole. Connection goes beyond just being in contact with someone. Head-to-head connections (the robot way) are not enough. A true connection runs from heart to heart.

Photo by See-ming Lee from New York, NY, USA - Happiness

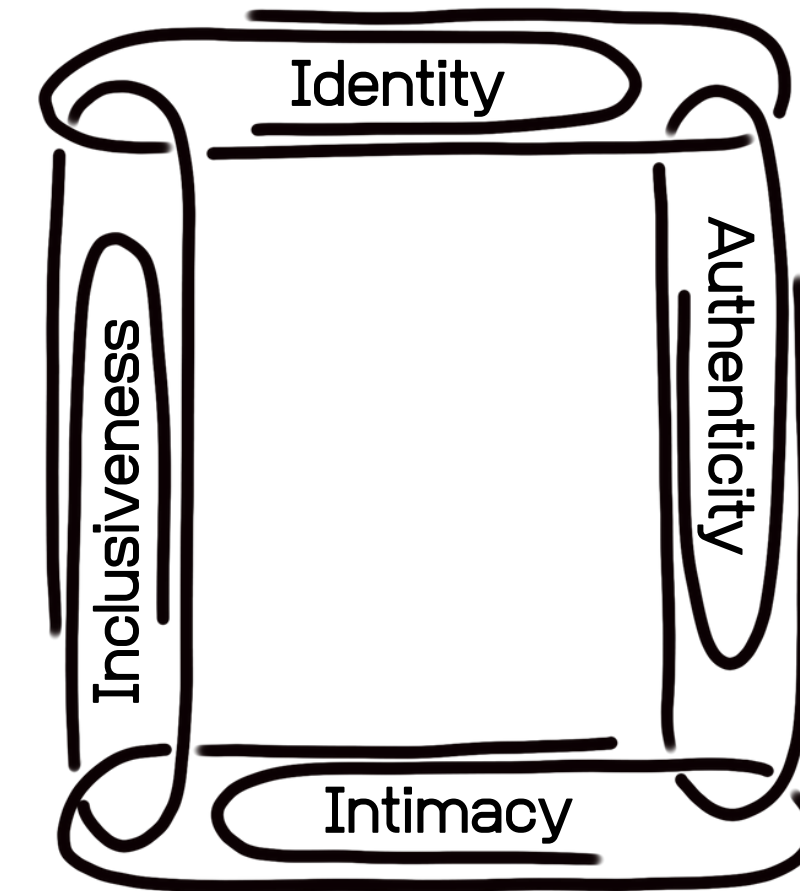


## THE CHAIN OF CONNECTION

This simple model 'the chain of connection' will help you understand how you can connect. Whether as a person or as an organization. For implementation in the business domain the fundamentals are exactly the same.

The chain of connection consists of four links. Each link is connected to the next one. And a link is nothing in itself. The links are:

- **Identity:** knowing who you are, feeling who you are and being okay with that.
- **Authenticity:** dare to be yourself when in contact with others.
- **Intimacy:** opening yourself up to a real connection with another. Not from head to head, but from heart to heart.
- **Inclusiveness:** connecting with the whole. See yourself as part of a larger whole.



The ability to connect builds up from the first to the fourth link. It is not one or the other, it's one after the other. Aiming for all.

### There are two conditions:

- 1: Your ability to connect requires regular reflection. Because at some point in your life it may all go very well and you will be nicely 'connected', but we all know that things can happen that put you off balance. Life is full of surprises and this means that you have to adjust and reposition yourself.
- 2: Your ability to connect is not an individual journey. We are all part of a network, and with that comes a responsibility. To feed the network. To give and take. Sometimes you have a giving role. Sometimes you'll be receiving.



Truly connected in a digital age



## CONTACT DETAILS

EmpoweringPeople  
KNSM laan 551  
1019 LD Amsterdam  
Margôt van Brakel  
06-16596060  
[info@empoweringpeople.nl](mailto:info@empoweringpeople.nl)

[www.EmpoweringPeople.nl](http://www.EmpoweringPeople.nl)  
[www.MargotvanBrakel.com](http://www.MargotvanBrakel.com)

