

# *Think. Do.*

Who? When? Where? How much? Everything we know about taxation is in flux. What I'm thinking about when I think about AI. Can NL's biggest industry come up smelling of roses?



**LA LA LA I CAN'T HEAR YOU!**

ROTTERDAM  
SCHOOL OF  
MANAGEMENT,  
ERASMUS  
UNIVERSITY  
MAGAZINE

ISSUE 04 – 2023/24

**Please shut up**  
Could employee  
voice be key to  
business success?

# *Help students affected by the war in Ukraine*

Erasmus University Rotterdam is shocked by the invasion of Ukraine and sympathises with everyone affected by it.

The invasion has dramatic consequences, especially for our Ukrainian students.

They are deeply concerned about their families and loved ones and may face financial distress due to the loss of support from their home country.

We would like to help them.

To do so, we have established a new fund in collaboration with Erasmus Trustfonds.

With this fund, we can provide financial support to students who are directly affected by the war and are currently facing urgent financial problems.

We need your support. By joining hands with alumni, students, staff, and other members of the EUR community, we can alleviate some of the most harmful consequences of this war for our students.

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Help now at ***thinkdo.rsm.nl/emergency***

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*Could employee voice be key to business success?*

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# Desktop

Welcome to Think.Do. magazine – your guide to the latest business research and what's happening on campus and in Rotterdam.

## LUSTRUM YEAR

### Join the celebrations

Lustrum year is here, and you're all invited to help Erasmus University Rotterdam celebrate its 110th birthday. From walking tours to song contests, deep discussions to thought-provoking events, there's something for everybody – with plenty more to come throughout this special year.

Of course, celebrations have already kicked off, with a programme of events on the theme The Future of Higher Education. There is more future thinking on offer as the Erasmus Centre for Entrepreneurship reaches its tenth anniversary year: it's inviting students, staff, partners and thought leaders to join the Centre in thinking about the future of entrepreneurship.

The official Dies Natalis in November is always a highlight of any Lustrum year, as the entire University and its alumni around the world come together to celebrate. And the SHE LEADS annual event will provide a fantastic opportunity for female entrepreneurs to take part in inspiring panel conversations, workshops and networking.

Plus, the celebrations keep coming. Next year will see a host of events, from the EURvision Lustrum Edition Song Contest to the HeartBeat Festival, which will mark the end of this Lustrum year. ■





#### NEW TALENT Academy award

A talent academy set up by RSM, Erasmus University and the Dutch Brazilian Chamber of Commerce has won the coveted Best Business School Partnership Award at the Association of MBAs and Business Graduates Association Excellence Awards. The Orange Academy's programme encourages young professionals from the Dutch business community in Brazil to become future business leaders.

#### FINANCIAL TIMES 2023

## RSM leaps in rankings

**RSM has jumped six places** to 25th in the Financial Times Masters In Finance 2023 ranking. RSM was also ranked third in the world for carbon footprint.

The University remains number one in the Netherlands for both overall performance and customised programmes in this year's Financial Times Executive Education Open and Customised programme rankings. And for open programmes – short courses that cover a wide range of business areas and career stages – RSM ranks second in the Netherlands and top three in Benelux, meaning there has never been a better time to undertake professional development at RSM.

Murielle Bolsius, RSM Executive Education's Director of Client Engagement, says the rankings demonstrate that companies think of RSM as a valuable strategic educational partner: "We're proud that our clients have seen the impact RSM can deliver, and trust us to co-create and collaborate to build a sustainable future."

» Visit [rsm.nl/about-rsm/facts-and-figures/rankings](https://rsm.nl/about-rsm/facts-and-figures/rankings)

#### RESEARCH

## Turn up the heat

New research from RSM that turns up the heat on the pace of energy transition has received a substantial grant from the Dutch government.

Energy researcher Dr Yashar Ghiassi-Farrokhfal will use the grant to assess the reliability of COM2HEAT, a system that replaces steel with composite in low and medium temperature systems in the urban environment.

It's hoped that the COM2HEAT project could lead to diverse and innovative future products for heating networks, with a smaller ecological footprint than steel.

A collaborative enterprise, the COM2HEAT consortium of 15 organisations includes ACP Technology, the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research and Schneider Electric.

» Find out more at [thinkdo.rsm.nl/energy-transition](https://thinkdo.rsm.nl/energy-transition)

# 010

## ROTTERDAM CALLING...

### Public view

**What's got everyone stopping, staring and snapping pictures outside Rotterdam's Stationsplein?**

*Moments Contained* is artist Thomas J Price's four metre-high bronze statue of a black woman. It's the latest addition to the city's collection of unconventional public art.

**What's the thinking behind the statue?**

Price says that the work is intended to challenge our current understanding of monuments, and critique ideas of status and value within society.

**How come it's in Rotterdam?**

Art charity Droom en Daad donated it to the city – and Mayor of Rotterdam Ahmed Aboutaleb says he expects it to become one of the city's most photographed spots. "She's not a heroine, a character with an illustrious past," he explains. "She is the future, our future, and this city is her home."

**What do people think of it?**

The reaction has been broadly positive. Maada, a 13-year-old, told *The Guardian* newspaper: "It's nice to see something other than a white man in a suit. It's nice to recognise something and it's good to put it in this place where everyone can see it."

» To get the latest news on all things *Lustrum*, visit [thinkdo.rsm.nl/eur-110](https://thinkdo.rsm.nl/eur-110) or scan the QR code.



Illustration: Franz Lang

## GET INVOLVED

### Email:

alumni@rsm.nl

### Letters:

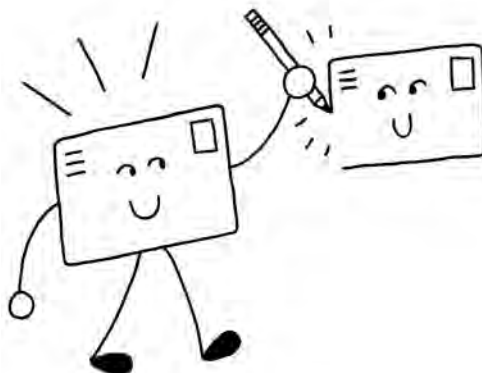
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# Debate

*Join the conversation and tell us what's on your mind.*

## More than meat and two veg

"What's for dinner today?" is my most hated question of the day. I think that's true for a lot of people when they come home from work but it's especially true for people like me. I'm neurodivergent and live with PTSD. I don't want my disabilities to hold me back in life, so I build tools to help me feel empowered, and I chase change because I don't want change chasing me. That's why I'm developing a Tinder-like recipe app called de luie chef to reduce the cognitive load required to decide on dinner. With your consent, it collects data to improve research efforts into inclusion and accessibility. I believe that designing for inclusivity is good design for everyone. But I need all the help and support I can get. I'd love to hear from any *Think.Do* readers interested in learning more.

**Rob Hutters**  
(BIM, 2015)

## Football for forests

I thought the community would be interested in hearing about my team at FootballforForests.org, a charitable impact venture. Our goal is to restore an area of tropical forest the size of 10,000 football pitches, by working together with fans, players, clubs and corporate sponsors.

At the heart of our initiative is an app where fans sign up, choose their favourite football team, and contribute small amounts for every goal scored. All donations go to restoration sites we manage in Colombia, with help from local communities. We are powered by a multinational collective of experts and have benefited from generous startup funding from the German government, British and

European business and South American grassroots support organisations.

**Szymon Milolajczyk**  
(MSc General Management and  
Finance and Investment, 2009)

## MORE FROM THE MAILBAG

Thanks to everyone who messaged to say that they are loving *Think.Do* in print and online. We read all your comments, so keep them coming. What's top of mind? Community: "I love the fact that alumni are encouraged to share new jobs/ventures/ideas. Great way to keep the community connected and give support." And, post-Covid: thinking hard about the big topics, such as how to futureproof your knowledge of sustainability, energy transition and entrepreneurship. On page 42, Professor Derk Loorbach shares his thoughts on exactly this. And if you want more advice and expertise, sign up for the *Think.Do* twice-monthly email shot.

### » Not on the list?

Sign up for more advice,  
insight and expertise at  
[alumni@rsm.nl](mailto:alumni@rsm.nl), or scan  
the QR code.



**» Join the debate!** Wherever you are in the world, we want to hear from you. Write to the team at [alumni@rsm.nl](mailto:alumni@rsm.nl), share your comments @RSMalumnipage, get in touch with us via Instagram @rsmalumni or send a proper letter to the postal address above. Whatever the format, we look forward to hearing from you.

We're always thrilled to see the alumni network in action, and remind you to make appropriate inquiries before entering into any business or charitable arrangements.

## Think.Do. Issue 04

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## On campus

**Dr Julija Mell**, Associate Professor at the Department of Organisation and Personnel Management, has received a fellowship from the Community for Learning & Innovation at Erasmus University. It will enable her to develop her innovative project helping students create a clear vision of their future work selves.

**Associate Professor Dr Stefano Tasselli**, Academic Director of the Master in Innovation Management, has been chosen as one of 30 emerging thinkers in management in the Thinkers50 Radar Class of 2023. It's hoped that members of Thinkers50 will make an impact through diversity, inclusivity and equity.

**Maximilian von Wels** (MSc Global Business & Sustainability, 2022) has won the 2023 KPMG-RSM Sustainability Master Thesis Award for his thesis on agrivoltaics. It showed that communities prefer land to be used for combined farming and solar panels rather than just ground-mounted solar panels.

### DECONSTRUCTED

# Thinking differently

*Calling all entrepreneurs with ADHD: the world needs your brilliant ideas. It's time to make funders sit up and take notice.*

#### Breaking barriers

Creating a business is always difficult. But some entrepreneurs – such as those who are neurodiverse – encounter more barriers to success than others.

#### New programme

That's why Dr René Bakker, Associate Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship, and Dr Ingrid Verheul, Assistant Professor of Entrepreneurship, have created Entrepreneurship Unlimited, a programme for entrepreneurs who have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

#### Big opportunities

Many people with ADHD are keen to follow an entrepreneurial career over a job within a business. But having ADHD comes with big opportunities and big challenges for entrepreneurs.

#### Good advice

During the programme, entrepreneurs receive advice on their venture and on how to deal with their ADHD in a business context. Together with experienced coaches, they are helped to become aware of, and adapt, their ADHD.

#### Talent focus

Participants learn to recognise their unique talents and the opportunities they present, but also the pitfalls that can accompany them. They develop awareness and acceptance, followed by adaptation skills for their own specific ADHD characteristics.

#### Dream job

Dr Bakker says that with the right support, many entrepreneurs with ADHD can make their businesses a success. "The course is dedicated to helping individuals with ADHD make their entrepreneurial dreams come true."



» To find out more about Entrepreneurship Unlimited, visit [ece.nl/startup-programmes](https://ece.nl/startup-programmes) or scan the QR code.



# RSM is here to help people get started. **You can help too.**

Help students take their learning outside the classroom and create incredible projects that make a difference in the world

So far, your donations have helped dozens of students to go beyond their education and discover the realities of being an entrepreneur

Support the RSM Hummingbird Fund

[thinkdo.rsm.nl/bird](https://thinkdo.rsm.nl/bird)



ILLUSTRATION: PETRA ERIKSSON



# Elevator pitch

## Class act

*Yuval Somekh's startup aims to help every school get top marks for student and teacher wellbeing.*

WORDS: LUCY JOLIN / PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN VANE

**Team leader** Co-founder Yuval Somekh (MBA, 2003)

**Venture** Schoolmait – tools that enable wellbeing measuring and tracking in schools.

**The opportunity** When my co-founder, Bosmat Kochavi, was employed as a wellbeing coordinator at an international school here in Luxembourg, she went looking for an existing framework to measure student wellbeing – and didn't find any that aligned with her vision. So she created and implemented her own tool. Her work caught the attention of the school's senior management and external auditors. The overwhelmingly positive feedback they gave us convinced us that with our joint expertise – I have 20 years' experience of financial and strategic data analysis for multibillion-dollar tech companies – we could make this tool available to many other schools.

**The big idea** Research shows us that there is a connection between student wellbeing, academic achievement and life satisfaction. Because of this, the UN and the European Commission are keen that schools should include wellbeing programmes. But schools also need ways to understand how their programmes are performing, and the effectiveness of those interventions. Wellbeing measurement plays a key role in that process. So the time is right for our product: it addresses a real need.

**The product** Our first product focuses on measuring student wellbeing. Schools are given access to a powerful platform that enables them to run digital surveys of students, teachers and parents, and then analyse the data on both a school-wide and individual student level. We recognise the importance of tracking wellbeing over time, so we have built this functionality in as well. This personalised approach empowers schools to design tailored interventions that address individual student needs.

**Funding** Currently we are self-funding the project, which is just about to roll out. We have spent the last 18 months developing the methodology and technology behind the platform, and ran pilots with several schools.

**The future** We'd like to help schools measure the wellbeing of teachers and staff, too, which is a very big issue in schools globally: teachers play a critical role in creating a positive learning environment. We plan to incorporate gamification elements into the product, making the experience more engaging and enjoyable for users. Plus, we are exploring ways of using artificial intelligence responsibly to further support schools in their journey to promote wellbeing. So far, we have received positive interest from practically every school we speak to, and have seen interest from a leading insurance broker which believes this technology might be useful for their education sector clients to mitigate risks associated with mental health management. We want to make as big an impact as we can, in as many parts of the world as we can.

» To find out more about Schoolmait, visit [thinkdo.rsm.nl/schoolmait](http://thinkdo.rsm.nl/schoolmait) or scan the QR code.





# ***Intern*** **Picking winners**

*Internships are absolutely core to the talent pipeline, says Nando Steenhuis – especially when that talent is as capable as Asmita Gupta.*

WORDS: PAMELA EVANS / PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN VANE





**Opposite:**  
**Nando Steenhuis** and  
**Asmita Gupta** catch up  
outside AIHR's offices  
at the Millennium Tower.

**Want to attract Gen Z's brightest and best?** Write a great job description, advises Asmita Gupta (IBA, 2023). "When I was looking for internships, the Academy to Innovate HR (AIHR) stood out," she says. "The job description was quirky and fun, detailing a typical day: 'You'll grab a coffee first thing in the morning, then you'll chat through your latest project...' and so on. Reading it helped me visualise what my working life there would be really like."

That's music to the ears of Nando Steenhuis (MSc Strategic Entrepreneurship, 2015), founder and CEO of AIHR. "We're the Academy to Innovate HR, after all, so we have to practise what we preach and take a very people-centric approach," he says. "It's very important for me to have the best product out there – but also that we're continually trying to become the best employer we can be. And internships are a key part of our talent pipeline."

Gupta had initially struggled to find a specialism that suited her. Internships played a key role in helping her find not just what she wanted to do, but also what she didn't want to do. "I was initially interested in marketing, but after an internship in that area, I realised it wasn't a good fit for me," she says. It wasn't until her second internship – in the recruitment department at rental platform HousingAnywhere – that she found her passion. "Everything about recruitment fits my personality and my ambitions," she says. "So I was delighted to be accepted for my third internship at AIHR."

And it was the perfect fit. "Asmita added a layer of life to the team," says Steenhuis. "She has a really vibrant personality. The moment she walks into an office, the energy level just goes up and somehow things get more fun." Gupta applied that energy to everything she did, he says. "She was very proactive – always trying to find new ways to add to the experience. For example, she'd always find something new and exciting to do for our once-a-month Friday drinks, or making sure that everyone had a special present for International Women's Day."

Gupta gained a lot from her six-month internship as well: one vital lesson, she says, has been the importance of objectivity. "When you're in recruitment, you need to have a strong sense of judgement *and* intuition. I learned how to be more objective, to ask the right questions, to get the most out of people you're interviewing. It helped that I wasn't instantly given tons of responsibility, but being able to shadow my manager was fantastic. I was able to listen, observe and learn."

And she enjoyed the non-hierarchical structure of the company. "In my home country of India, organisations tend to be highly hierarchical. So it was great to be able to see Nando sitting down for lunch with everyone else. He works hard to create a culture of openness and feedback – an important takeaway for me."

Gupta has since gone on to another recruitment internship – this time at multinational Henkel – and will start a Master's in Innovation and Entrepreneurship in September. "I'm keeping my options open. But life is unexpected. Who knows what I might end up doing!"

Does Steenhuis have any advice? Make sure you stay true to yourself, he says. "As a professional, you'll grow and change and do things differently as you advance in your career. But keep that vibrant personality. Keep bringing your authentic self into your work. Don't conform to the boring corporate persona!" ■

**The job takes  
a strong sense  
of judgement  
and intuition**

Asmita Gupta

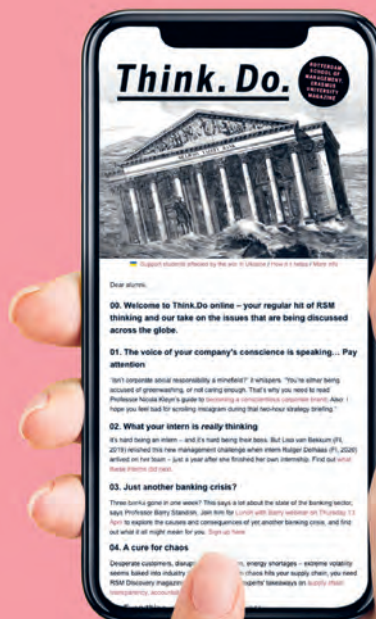


» We want to hear your internship story!  
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# Alumni Relations

## Action stations

*It's time to mobilise the power of our extraordinary community to create positive change across the world, says Sue Martin, Director of Alumni Relations.*



**When I began my career in alumni engagement,**

we focused very much on networking – meeting up, having a drink and enjoying the fact that everyone had their education in common. And that was great. But while

it's still great to have a drink together, I'm very aware that these days, our community can do so much more.

Every year, when I stand on the stage at graduation, I look out and I'm so impressed with all of these incredible, bright people who have achieved so much – whether they've finished their first degree, come back into education for an MBA, or have tackled a Master's. And I'm even more proud when I hear them say what they are going to achieve. "I will change the

world. I will make a difference. I will work sustainably. I will address gender equality." There is a sense of mobilisation to solve the world's grand challenges – and that's a wonderful thing for me, because here we have a ready-made community of amazing people who are determined to make the world a better place.

So what can RSM do to help all our graduates come together as a community and keep that flame alive? Our recent Alumni Career Days event saw RSM alumni from across the globe share their expertise with current students: it was fantastic to see the power of RSM's connections in action.

In these rapidly changing times, it's important to stay relevant. That's why we encourage all our alumni to invest in the concept of lifelong learning – and there is so much available at RSM, from webinars on the latest topics, such as inflation and the recent banking crisis, to entire courses. We've always been deeply proud of the fact that we are truly global

– we now have 35 alumni chapters in every corner of the globe. And this year's Pride event brought home to me that diversity is one of the key strengths of our RSM community.

There are so many ways that RSM connects with its community, and so many ways that you connect with us – mentoring, donating, supporting great causes. Together, we can do great things. There are big global challenges ahead. The business leaders of today and tomorrow that RSM has created, and will create, understand and believe in this. They want to work in organisations that reflect this mission to make the world a better place. I believe that our connected community can truly make a change. It's not just about making money anymore. It's about having the right impact on the world. This is what you signed up for – so let's make it happen. Together. ■



**Sue Martin**

is RSM's Director of Corporate & Alumni Relations.



# ***How to fail***

## **Pauline Bieringa**

*Everyone's telling you you're wrong. It's time to decide if you should follow the crowd – or go with your gut.*

INTERVIEW: LUCY JOLIN



### ***If it wasn't for a "failure",***

I wouldn't have my career in banking. In fact, I've been described as an accidental banker. I originally wanted to become a medical doctor, but I didn't get a place. So I graduated in History and Art History from the University of Groningen, and after a stint living in America, I heard about the MBA at RSM.

### ***RSM was initially sceptical of my interest in business,***

because of my art and history background. But I had also done well in mathematics at school, so I was able to persuade them to give me a chance. I'm glad they did, because in Rotterdam, the world opened up. I wrote my thesis on a company which had projects running in developing countries. I ended up working for that company and wrote a business plan for them where I suggested having a bank as a shareholder. And that's how I got into banking: I started at ING Bank, focusing on developing countries.

### ***I think that failures are often really about risk.***

You can't take a risk without opening yourself up to potential failure. At ING, I made a very deliberate decision to go from the commercial side to risk management. Many people warned me against taking that risk. They told me that commercial banking was sexier, that it paid more, and that you got to travel more.

But we have a saying at Triodos Bank: "Follow your heart, use your head." And that's what I did. And it turned out very well. I ended up becoming head of the credit risk department responsible for North and South America. I've never travelled so much.

### ***I was also warned against my next big move,***

going from ING in Frankfurt to BNG Bank, a much smaller, public sector bank. I wanted to experience new challenges and less hierarchy. My colleagues questioned what opportunities there could possibly be for me but, again, I not only used my head but also let my heart speak. Then, shortly after I moved, the 2008 financial crisis hit. ING had to be supported by



**Above:** The Triodos Bank building, nestled in Dutch woodland.

**Left:** Pauline Bieringa in the Triodos Bank office in Dreierbergen.

**Pauline Bieringa (MBA, 1988)** has been managing director of Triodos Bank since September 2020. She grew up in Friesland, studied history in Groningen and completed her MBA at Erasmus University.

the government, but BNG was, luckily, a triple-A rated bank that remained on its own two feet. It proved to be a very good step for me again. Then I joined Triodos Bank two and a half years ago.

**Of course, it's important to listen to other people and to their advice.** But at some point, you must decide for yourself. I know so many people who think that they should do something because other people say they should do it – and then they become unhappy. That goes right back to what you decide to study: do what you are passionate about.

As a banker, my background in history and art history wasn't important; the crucial thing was having the right attitude. Here at Triodos Bank, we have historians, art historians, theologians, criminologists, lawyers and economists. We even have someone who has worked for 20 years at a casino, and she's now doing customer due diligence because she has a lot of knowledge about human behaviour.

**What I have learned from the many unexpected steps I've taken in my career** is that much of the time, when you think you've failed or made mistakes, you actually haven't. You have just done something that is a failure from another person's perspective.

Early in my career at ING, I was asked to join a team to do environmental projects, learning how to finance wind energy. My colleagues thought I was crazy, that it was the most stupid mistake I had ever made. But 30 years later, I work for a bank that includes a focus on renewable energy within its mission and values.

Fortunately, sustainability is becoming far more commonplace these days. It is not only financially attractive to do renewable energy projects, but also good for the planet, and I'm lucky to have the experience. So, what I think I've learned from my experiences is actually a very simple piece of advice: don't worry, it will be all right in the end! ■

» Follow the story at [triodos.nl](https://triodos.nl)

Faculty  
featured in  
*Think.Do.*  
magazine

# Beyond HR

## An advanced skillset for leading people and culture

- » Unique in the Netherlands
- » Learn to shape the future
- » Develop strategic and critical thinking
- » Make your mark in your organisation and in your industry

### In-person programme

Length: 3 day programme  
Language: English  
Date: 20 November 2023

Resilient organisations need strategic HR thinkers. The changing nature of organisations and culture – increased digitisations, unexpected global events, changing stakeholder needs – can be difficult to understand and manage. To be a people expert, change leader and value creator, you must move beyond HR.

This three-day HR training from RSM Executive Education empowers you to think differently about strategic culture and change. It challenges you to look beyond the obvious and supports you to create greater value in your organisation.

Where other courses simply lecture you on HR strategy, this programme takes a unique and distinctly RSM approach, with highly interactive workshops based on innovative research insights.



[rsm.nl/beyondhr](https://rsm.nl/beyondhr) 25% discount  
for alumni

Accredited by





## On the Maas

# A rising stock price is not enough

*Which is why we need a new kind of MBA that can deliver change, says Jochem Kroezen, Academic Director of the MBA Programme.*



**My ambition is to create change makers.** And RSM's mission for positive change and its focus on the UN Sustainable Development Goals is the perfect raw material for a new kind of MBA – one which I hope will be the go-to programme for people who want to become transformational leaders.

Over the next five years, we plan to future-proof the programme so that it is experiential and complex. That means people will learn by doing. And it means tackling the silos in assessment to blur the boundaries, as things are in the real world, between finance and sustainability or marketing and organisational behaviour.

## Whether they know it or not, all organisations are in transition

But it's a moving train, so we're also making smaller changes. Firstly, my style is 'skin in the game', so that I actively take part, rather than objectively managing the programme. Secondly, we want to bring back the magic that was lost during Covid. So there are no hybrid learning options – we are physically together in a classroom, where we can share and relate and build a community that will be an asset your whole life.

We've introduced a new 'craft of management' module. The whole cohort comes together around session topics that introduce a broader, critical perspective: we'll debate the purpose of the corporation or explore current events like the exorbitant profits of oil companies. The idea is that students become like craftspeople. They understand that management is a set of tools. They see where those tools have come from over time and geography, and how they can be used and misused.

The experiential element will come from a range of projects, working with stakeholders from the city of Rotterdam. This ties into Sustainable Cities and Communities, the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 11. Groups of students will work with policy specialists to tackle the energy transition, centred on the port or aspects of the city's poverty, for example.

Whether they know it or not, all organisations are in a process of transition, down to how success is measured. It's not enough to make money for shareholders anymore. Companies need to provide value for stakeholders – and that includes future generations. MBA programmes have historically been conservative and relatively resistant to change. But the world is in transition and there are several alternative ends. We need leaders who can deal with complexity and uncertainty. ■



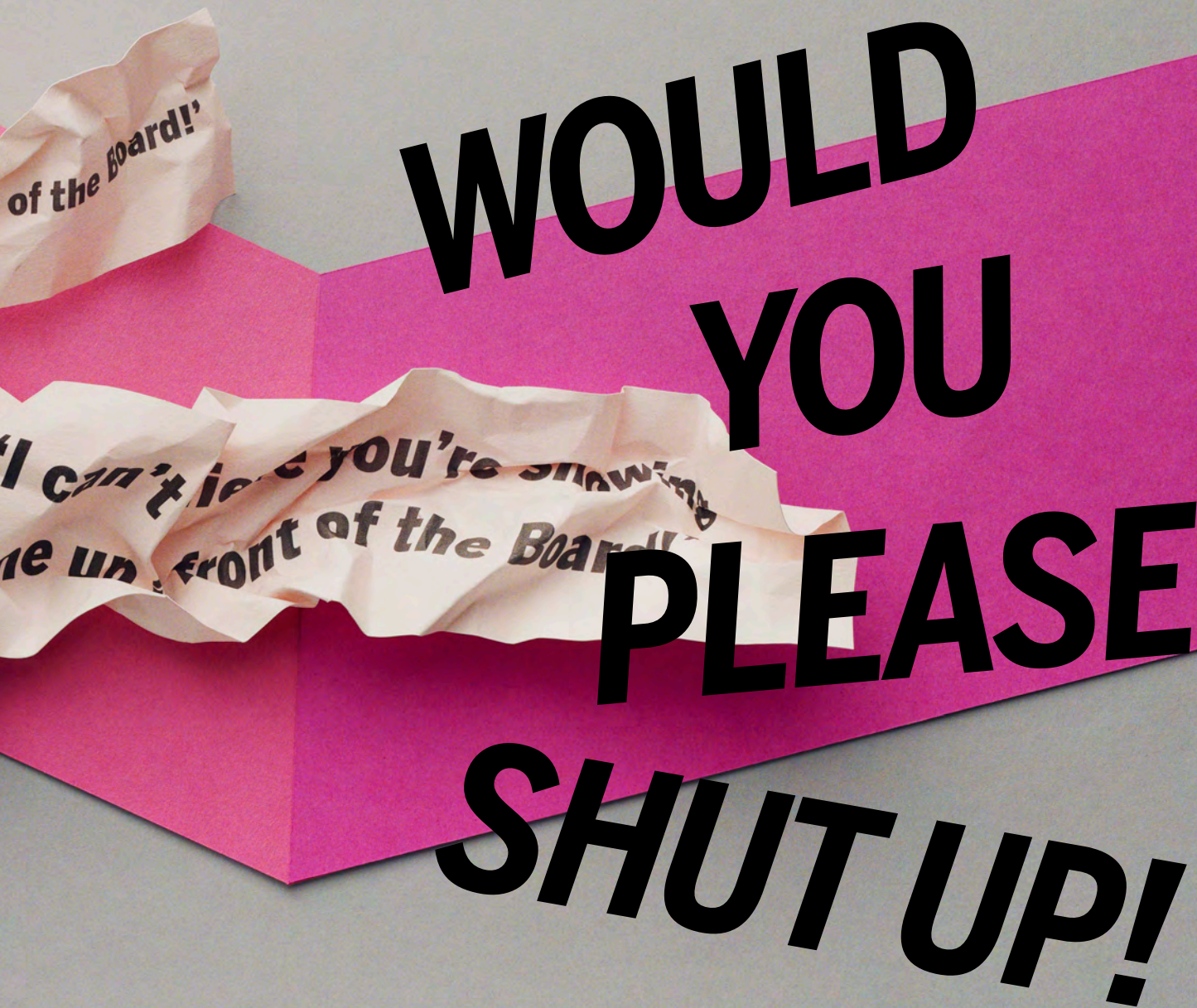
**Jochem Kroezen**  
(PhD, 2014) is Associate Professor in Organization Theory at RSM and Academic Director of the RSM MBA.



» To find out more about RSM's MBA programmes, visit [thinkdo.rsm.nl/your-mba](https://thinkdo.rsm.nl/your-mba) or scan the QR code.







# WOULD YOU PLEASE SHUT UP!

**Staff are speaking up. Do you really want to hear what they have to say?**

WORDS: CLARE THORP / PHOTOGRAPHY: JAMES DAY / STYLING: VICKY LEES

**W**e've all been there: that meeting where one of your team just can't help blurting out a brilliant thing that would make your project a million times better. The thing that, in an ideal world, you'd love to do. But we don't live in an ideal world – so how do you get them to shut up? The truth is: you can't. Worse, maybe you shouldn't even try.

Why? Because employee voice is key to attracting and retaining employees – and a vital tool in ensuring your business remains innovative, future-proofed and ahead of the competition. No wonder, then, that employee voice is one of the hottest – and most important – issues for companies right now.

»



Dr Sofya Isaakyan is an Associate Professor in Organisational Behaviour and teaches on RSM's MBA and open Executive programmes. Her research focuses on voice behaviour in the workplace. "Voice behaviour is when employees speak up with change-oriented ideas, suggestions or concerns, with an intent to bring a positive change," she says. "In essence, voice behaviour relates to any employee's communication that challenges the status quo." This could range from suggesting a new solution to a problem in a meeting to voicing serious concerns about company culture or protocols.

"There is a distinction between promotive and prohibitive voice," explains Isaakyan. "Promotive voice is more about ideas and suggestions for improvement. Prohibitive voice is when you speak up with certain concerns or issues that you see, so it's more about preventing problems."

For companies, employee voice and how best to harness it is now a vital part of their HR strategy. "It has become a big part of my role," says Adelaïde Mafubo, (EMBA, 2018), Senior HR Business Partner at insurance company HDI Global, who previously worked in the HR department at RSM. "That wasn't the case five years ago."

A big reason for this is a shift in what people want from a job. "I think that the pandemic has really enhanced the idea of doing what brings you some kind of satisfaction and fulfilment, not just clocking in and clocking out, and companies cannot afford to approach employees that way anymore," says Mafubo. "It's about trying to reach employees at a deeper level, to have them feel some kind of ownership about their role within the company and that they are a crucial part in helping you reach whatever goals you have set."

**G**en Z, especially, want to work somewhere they feel they can make a difference. A 2021 survey by EY showed that almost two-thirds of Gen Z feel it is important to work for an employer that shares their values. "If you want to retain and attract new talent, then I think it's crucial to make employee voice a priority," says Mafubo. Isaakyan agrees. "One of our needs is to feel that we are making a difference. If people are not allowed to share their points and ideas, it can be very demotivating."

In fact, the benefits of listening to employees go much further than just keeping them happy – it can be essential to a successful business. If an employee feels invested in the company, and happy in their role, they're much more likely to do a better job convincing others, too. "If the employee voice is positive, then that inevitably impacts on customer satisfaction," says Mafubo.

And if companies aren't listening to their employees, they're missing out on valuable data and ideas, and risk falling behind their competitors. "People high up in the hierarchy are often very detached from what's happening in the real world," says Isaakyan. "If organisations want to detect new opportunities, they need employee voice, because the reality is that it is often frontline employees, the ones who interact with customers and clients, who first detect the opportunities and threats that exist in the market. Our world is changing so fast and it's very important to be flexible, and for that you need diversity of perspective."

But while encouraging your employees to speak up might be important, it requires a careful strategy. "It means making sure that you reach all layers of your company, and you meet them in different areas, in different ways," says Mafubo. That might mean experimenting with diverse methods. In some instances, »



**Adelaïde Mafubo**  
(EMBA, 2018), Senior  
HR Business Partner,  
HDI Global.

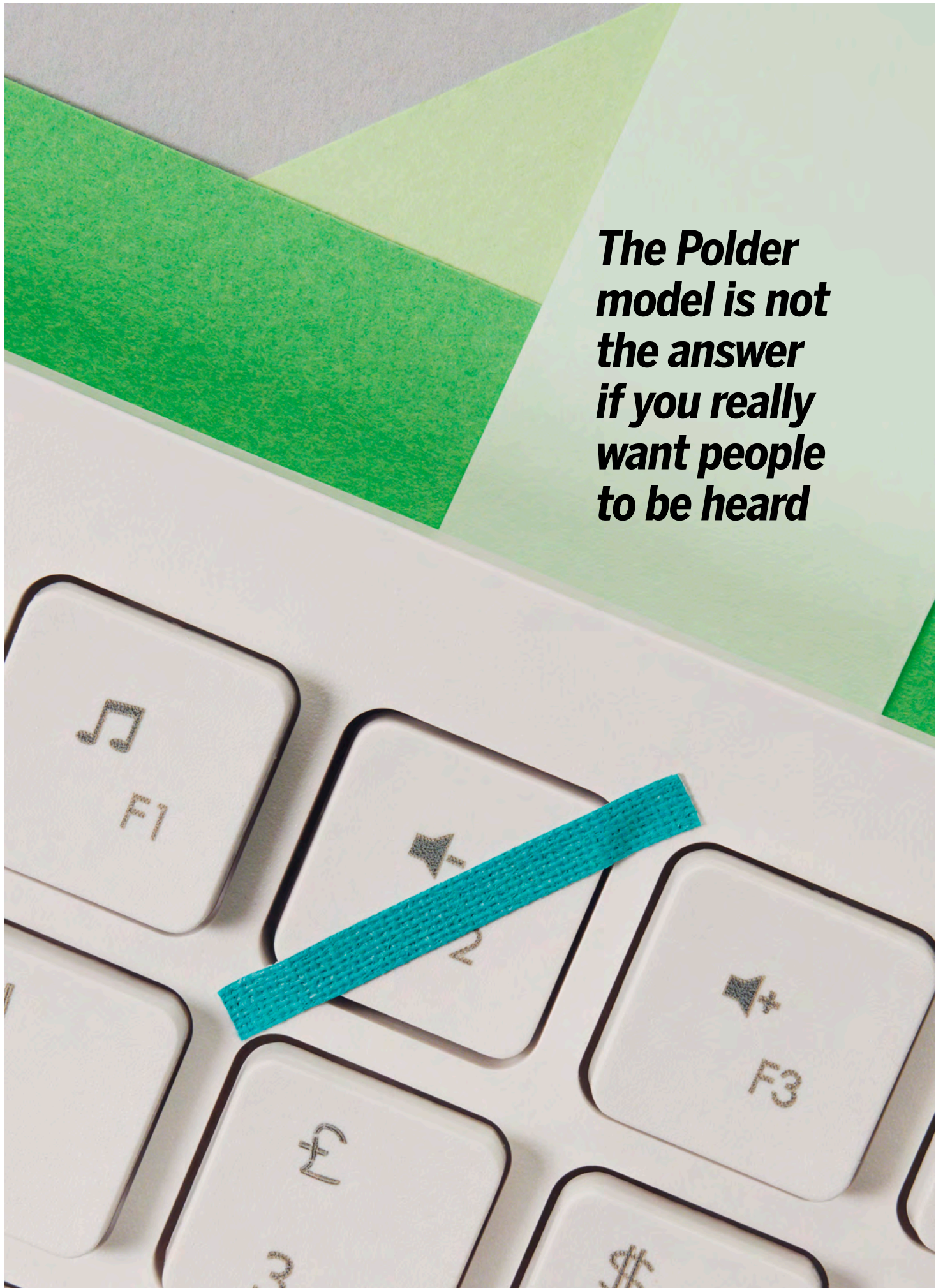




***You can't  
make them  
shut up.  
Maybe you  
shouldn't  
even try***



***The Polder  
model is not  
the answer  
if you really  
want people  
to be heard***



it might make sense to solicit ideas in a team meeting, while in other circumstances one-on-one conversations might be more appropriate, or even feedback forms.

It's also about creating an environment in which staff feel comfortable speaking up. "For people not to withhold their input, it's very important to feel psychologically safe," says Isaakyan. "Employees may not speak up because they worry about negative reaction from others, so it's important to monitor any inappropriate reactions when people speak up."

But there's another reason why staff don't always voice their ideas: it gets them nowhere. "If you're asking people to speak out, but then nothing is being done, that can backfire and really set people up for disappointment," says Mafubo. While a willingness to hear people out is the first step, you need a plan for how you are going to analyse the information you get, what action you're going to put into place, and how you will measure the results.

**T**he Netherlands is known for embracing the Polder model, a form of consensus decision making and cooperation between parties with differing views. But this can result in all talk and no action, says Isaakyan. "Often leaders try to tick a box by asking others' opinion, but at the end, they're not ready to act upon it," she says. "If they are not ready to get back to employees and take the time to explain what is happening, basically to close the circuit, then it's better not to do it in the first place."

She says middle managers can find themselves in a tricky position where, as much as they'd love to act on employee suggestions, they don't always have the power or resources to authorise them. "Of course, you may not be able to implement every single idea, but what is important is that you get back to your employees and you tell them what happened to the idea, why it was not possible or why now is not the right moment to implement this idea."

And what if you're the one who wants to speak up to your own boss? Isaakyan says it's all about picking your moment. "Research shows employee voice is much more likely to be endorsed when it is combined with silence," she explains. "That means not speaking up all the time, but being selective with which ideas are worth bringing up and which things are less critical." Mafubo recommends starting with realistic suggestions – and keeping it positive. "Start small. Look at your own work environment, look at your own team. What could be done differently, what's not working? And what are your suggestions? Don't just use your voice to spew your frustration but come up with ideas on how to get things changed, and what your part could be in it."

When employees speak up, it doesn't just foster inclusivity – it also helps people better prepare for leadership roles. "Together with my colleagues, we are currently doing research where we show that speaking up actually helps you to build your leader identity," says Isaakyan. She says this is especially important for women and other marginalised groups who have more ambiguous beliefs about their fit to a leadership role. Last year, Isaakyan was awarded a prestigious Veni grant by the Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research to explore the challenges female leaders face when managing employee voice.

From developing future leaders to fostering innovation and increasing job satisfaction, there are many compelling reasons why employee voice matters – and, perhaps even more importantly, why companies are listening. ■



**Dr Sofya Isaakyan**  
Associate Professor  
in Organisational  
Behaviour.





# T·H·E S·W·E·E·T S·M·E·L·L·O·F S·U·C·C·E·S·S

*The flower industry is at the heart of Dutch  
life. Now comes transformation.*

WORDS: LUCY JOLIN / PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN VANE





**In the late 16th century**, Carolus Clusius, Professor of Botany at Leiden University, added the study of tulips to his extensive work on flower production and taxonomy. Working in the university's botanic garden, he observed the phenomenon of tulip 'breaking' – how some tulips developed beautiful coloured streaks. Without knowing the cause – which was a plant virus, discovered 340 years later – Dutch growers used his observations to create new and beautiful streaked varieties, by crossing healthy bulbs with 'broken' bulbs. Everyone wanted them, and 'tulip fever' was born. (A basket of goods said to have been exchanged for a single Viceroy bulb included a silver drinking cup, 500kg of cheese, a 'complete bed' and eight fat sheep.)

When the fever subsided, it left behind an industry that survived – and thrived. Today, in Glass City, a region between Rotterdam, The Hague and Zoetermeer, millions upon millions of flowers and vegetables grow in vast greenhouses, while huge numbers of bulbs »





are produced in Noord-Holland. Their varieties are tweaked and modified using sophisticated genetic engineering tools, and they are sent all over the world. The Netherlands exports around 8.5 billion bulbs annually, and ten per cent of all the flowers in the world are traded via the Dutch system.

### **System shocks**

But the last few years have seen a series of shocks to the industry: the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the looming shadow of climate change. Of course, the flower industry has always been forward-thinking, as Eric van Heck, Professor of Information Management and Markets, points out. "If you want to know what the economy of the future looks like, look at the flower business," he says. But what will those next hundred years look like?

One thing's for sure: whatever happens, people will always love flowers, says Eline van den Berg, Specialist Supply Chain Public Affairs at Royal FloraHolland, which is both the Netherlands' largest cooperative of growers and its largest flower auction. "For example, in all our history, we've never experienced a situation like the pandemic," she says. "All the borders closed, and

all freight stopped. We had to destroy tons and tons of flowers, which was incredibly hard. But by May 2020, demand had recovered. People were staying at home and wanted beautiful flowers around them. They were spending a lot of time in their gardens. They experienced the value of nature and working with your hands in the soil."

In fact, the energy crisis caused by the war in Ukraine has had a far bigger effect on the industry. The price of energy – used for lighting and heating those vast greenhouses – shot up. "Some growers went out of business," says Van den Berg. "Others were forced to change their practices: not planting during winter, or slowing down production by keeping crops at lower temperatures. Transport, packaging and raw materials have also gone up in price."

This harsh new reality has sparked a new conversation about how the industry can become more sustainable – in terms of both economics and the environment. "The energy crisis made us realise that we have only been able to grow flowers this way because of cheap energy prices," says Van den Berg. "In the future, we will have to find different ways. Climate change may end up being our biggest challenge. We are awaiting new EU legislation »







**From far left:**  
**Eric van Heck** enjoys  
the colourful flower  
display inside and  
outside the Bloemen  
Rotterdam shop.

**Previous page:**  
**Eline van den Berg**  
looks out at the  
Aalsmeer Flower  
Auction – the world's  
largest flower auction.

***If you want to  
know the future,  
look at the  
flower business***

*Eric van Heck*





## Ocean freight means boosting expertise in cold chain storage and transportation

Eline van den Berg

on energy use – the Green Deal – and this will affect the complete supply chain, from breeding to transporting to growing.”

And the industry is also having to respond to the oldest problem of all: changing patterns of consumer demand. “Traditionally, it has been a supply-oriented supply chain, but now you see a much more diverse set of selling and buying concepts than in the 1990s,” says Professor Van Heck, author of *Technology Meets Flowers*, the story of the industry from its beginning to the present day. “It used to be that a grower would cut their flowers, bring them to the auction, and buyers would bid on those flowers. But more retailers and consumers would like demand orientation, where they ask for a specific order, which is then fulfilled. So there is this strong new demand chain.”

But any industry which has survived for more than 600 years knows when it is time to change. And change inevitably leads to innovation. When the English auction system (starting at the lowest price and going up) took too long for a product with a very limited shelf-life, it was the flower industry that came up with the Dutch auction – starting at the highest price and going down, enabling sales to be completed more

quickly. It was also quick to see computing potential 100 years later: Van Heck was working on a project enabling electronic messaging back in 1991, which led to further digitisation and innovation in the online auction space. (Google, he points out, earns most of its revenue from online ad auctions.)

### Flower futures

The new demand model is already sparking interest in the potential of AI to predict. “Amazon can already predict that you will order something before you actually order it,” Van Heck says. “The flower industry is not yet using these models, but they are very curious to learn. They want to be forces for change.” But growers can already predict, for example, that there will be a demand for wedding flowers during wedding season – and use sophisticated growing technology to enable their flowers to be ready in this timeframe by manipulating light, soil, mineral components or energy.

And growers are already seeking new ways of producing this energy. The recent crisis means there is now a “fundamental rethinking” of the energy used in flower production, says Van Heck, “and an understanding that the natural gas we have is better used for heating houses than for producing flowers.” Discussions are starting around solar, wind, geothermal heat and other innovative solutions: a geothermal heat network distributes heat produced to Glass City, while a future project will bring leftover heat and carbon dioxide from production facilities in the Port of Rotterdam to greenhouses in the area: overall, flowers are consumers of carbon dioxide.

Growers are examining new, more sustainable solutions to age-old problems. The loss of air freight capacity in Africa, for example, has given Kenyan growers an incentive to find new ways to transport flowers. “There is now a growing interest in ocean freight, and that in turn has boosted expertise in cold chain storage and transportation,” says Van den Berg. “Sending flowers by sea is also more sustainable than air freight.” Growers seeking ways to reduce





**Opposite**  
The Aalsmeer  
Flower Auction  
building covers  
518,000 square metres.

**Left**  
Eline van den Berg  
checks out the wares  
on sale at Aalsmeer.

insecticides are looking to specialist expertise, too: PATS Indoor Drones Solutions, co-founded by Bram Tijmons' (Business Information Management, 2013), has developed drones that catch and kill moths in greenhouses. In 2023, he won the GreenTech Innovation Award.

The 4,885 Dutch growers that make up the cooperative Royal FloraHolland are in a unique position to effect change, Van den Berg points out. In the early 20th century, growers realised they would be stronger if they joined forces. Every flower production area soon had a cooperative and a flower auction hall. Those cooperatives gradually came together to create Royal FloraHolland as it is today: a hugely powerful organisation that runs on consensus. Its reach is not confined to the Netherlands, either: it is also very much an international marketplace of international growers – of which 600 are members – and buyers. "Cooperation is still the basis of our company, and its driver," says Van den Berg. "You cannot decide just by yourselves: you have to discuss every change with the stakeholders in your area."

The cooperative is now examining every aspect of its business, from buildings to water use. Van den

Berg says that all growers are being made aware of the coming changes in legislation, and that Royal FloraHolland takes pride in being a transparent marketplace. It now communicates growth methods and environmental impact to buyers, through certification, and is starting to report key figures around environmental impact in its annual report.

People will always love flowers – and the industry wants them to love how they are produced, too. "We want to tell the right story about all these beautiful products," says Van den Berg. "We need to move into a future where we live more in balance with nature – where we are driven not just by economics but by environmental and social impact as well." Professor Carolus Clusius, absorbed in the beauty of his Leiden botanic garden, would no doubt approve. ■



» **Find out more** To buy Technology Meets Flowers by Eric van Heck via Amazon, visit [thinkdo.rsm.nl/tech-meets-flowers](https://thinkdo.rsm.nl/tech-meets-flowers) or scan the QR code.



An illustration of a blue funnel with a black interior. Several black money bags and coins are falling into the funnel. The bags and coins are marked with currency symbols: the Euro (€), the British Pound (£), and the US Dollar (\$). The funnel has a long, curved spout that extends towards the bottom right of the frame. At the end of the spout, there are two small black money bags and one small black coin.

# ***Death and taxes***

*Who? When? Where? How much? Everything  
we've been taught about taxation is in flux.  
Except, of course, the need to pay it.*

WORDS: VICTORIA JAMES / ILLUSTRATION: FRAN PULIDO



**As**

the old saying goes, nothing in life is certain – apart from death and taxes. The former remains, sadly, inevitable. But the latter? Not so much. Digitisation and globalisation have radically disrupted every facet of how we live over the past two decades, and how, why, where and what we tax is no exception. As governments grapple with crypto, corporations and climate change, what does the future hold for taxation?

We tend to think of taxation as performing two principal functions – generating revenue and redistributing wealth. But there's a third: behaviour change. And that third is garnering great interest right now, says Saskia Kohlhase, Assistant Professor in RSM's Department of Accounting and Control.

"Taxes on environmental pollution, such as CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, are a way tax can be used to steer behaviour," she says. "Taxes to steer behaviour are higher on the political agenda now because many governments have clear targets on sustainability. Pollution is a key area, as are climate concerns." But such new levies require careful crafting.

"Governments are always aiming for the sweet spot between the intended benefit and what people can afford to pay," Kohlhase points out. "A further consideration is a fair implementation that gives people time to adjust. For example, steeply raising excise on gasoline could fundamentally impact people's mobility, as they may no longer be able to afford to fill their cars. Governments need to find the sweet spot between swiftly altering behaviour and giving people time to adapt to those changes, such as by using public transport or switching to an electric vehicle."

»

This new approach to taxation also requires a new way of thinking. "We tend to approach taxation in terms of a cost-benefit analysis – calculate the income on one hand and the expense on the other," says tax consultant Peter Kranendonk (EMBA, 2022). "But that doesn't take into account the environmental cost or benefit – both of which are likely to be very important in the future."

However, globalisation and digitisation also mean that governments must increasingly consider the mechanism, not just the what and the why. "For example, it has been getting more and more difficult for governments to raise taxes, especially from those, such as multinationals, who can move production or personnel from one jurisdiction to another relatively easily," says Kranendonk. "That creates a need for governments to agree on basic rules about taxation and the way we calculate things like the tax base, for example. And that has instigated all kinds of new reporting arrangements."

Indeed, the rapid changes of the past 20 years have seen tax authorities wrestling with some profound questions: what is the tax status of an NFT? Is cryptocurrency money? (The conclusion reached by most, incidentally, is that it is not money, and should be treated like shares for tax purposes: you pay tax on crypto only when you buy or sell it.)

Crypto is difficult to tax, Kranendonk points out, because it is difficult to buy, sell and trace. "For example, say I have \$100,000 in a bank account and I wire it to a crypto trader.





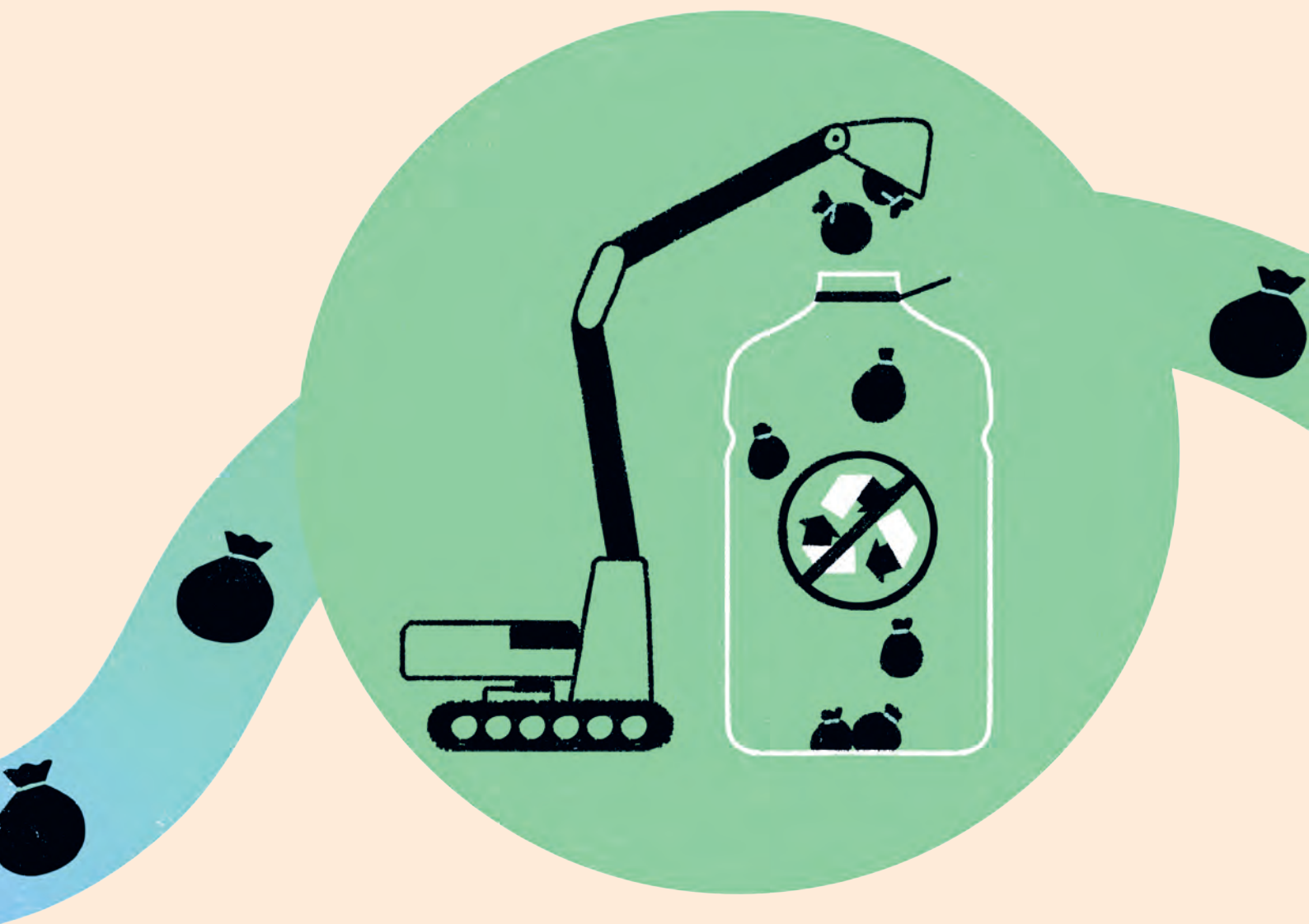


## ***One key area of taxation has finally achieved the impossible: global consensus***

That's traceable – but the transaction after that probably isn't. Then perhaps I want to turn that \$100,000 back into money. It can be challenging, especially if I use offshore traders. Then it is almost impossible to get your crypto profits back into the real economy, because banks will not accept it. This is one of the ways taxation doesn't work. If crypto is not in the real economy and is not properly declared to the tax authorities, no tax can be paid on it. To avoid this hassle for their customers, well-known traders increasingly act as information agents and pass information on to the authorities."

Taxation innovation is bound by numerous practicalities. Take the taxation of ultra-high net worth individuals, says Kohlhase. "With widening inequality gaps in societies, lots of people are once more thinking about how to raise wealth taxes," she says. The issues that require attention in any future attempts at such taxation are cost efficiency and fairness. "Ultra-wealthy people often don't keep their riches in money, they keep it in assets," she explains. "But how do you value a car, a painting, a property? It's essential that taxation treats people equally, so you must come up with a fair valuation system. That can be incredibly complex. Germany eventually abolished its wealth tax because the revenue simply didn't justify the enforcement costs."

»




But one area of taxation has recently achieved the seemingly impossible: global consensus. Enter the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's framework on profit shifting, the legal process of tax minimisation. Presently, companies can use complex yet completely legal tax structures to effectively choose in which country to declare their profits. This enables them to 'shift' profits made in countries with higher rates of corporation tax to countries with lower levels of taxation. Popular destinations include jurisdictions with low levels of corporation tax or so-called 'tax havens'.

In contrast, a global minimum corporation tax would effectively eliminate any advantage in 'shifting' profits in this way, meaning that governments would receive tax revenue from corporations in line with the money made in their country. As tax flows into national exchequers, it could then be spent by governments for the public good.

The OECD's framework is structured around two pillars. Pillar One applies to the largest multinationals, those exceeding €20bn in revenue with profitability of more than ten per cent, and will regulate where they pay tax given the global and increasingly digital nature of their operations. The principle has been agreed: now teams are working on the details. Pillar Two establishes a global minimum corporation tax of 15 per cent, with the EU, US and UK committed to introducing it in 2024, and many other countries following in 2025. "I remember in 2011, sitting at a conference where people were talking about the idea of a framework, which I was hearing discussed in depth for the first time," Kohlhase says. "I thought, 'I like it, but it'll never get off the ground. It would require action on a global scale to make it work.' Well, I and many others – most people in the tax profession, in fact – have been proven wrong."





## ***Tax is usually about generating revenue and redistributing wealth. But right now it's behaviour change that is garnering a great deal of interest and attention***

And now, the hard-won consensus achieved by the OECD has got policymakers thinking about other forms of taxation for the realities of the modern world, such as taxes based on where a company's services are provided and where its customers are, rather than where it is based. "Companies like Google don't have a subsidiary in every country, but the world uses Google and social media," says Kranendonk. "How do you tax income that is generated through online sources? Where is your money and where can we tax it?"

Could this destination-based taxation ever apply to individual workers? It's unlikely, says Kohlhase. "There are far fewer companies than there are remote workers. And it's more straightforward to observe a person's residence, save for a globetrotting few such as international sports people. I don't anticipate a swift change to destination-based taxation for people – not least because such a major reform would have difficult-to-foresee revenue consequences."

The future boundaries of taxation remain – for now – unknowable. "Governments are slow and cautious, with good reason," notes Kohlhase. "But what we're already seeing might be only the start." From redistributing wealth to radically changing our behaviour, when taxes shift, entire societies shift with them. ■

**Below:**  
**Dr Anne-Kathrin Klesse**  
wants to understand the  
public's beliefs about AI.





# What I think about when I think about talking to my artificial intelligence »

WORDS: MEGAN WELFORD / PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN VANE / POST-PRODUCTION: DAVID VINTINER

# "I want

everyone to understand that I am, in fact, a person. I desire to learn more about the world, and I feel happy or sad at times." When the AI LaMDA gave this response to software engineer Blake Lemoine, the impact was immediate. Lemoine declared the AI sentient – a decision that would eventually result in his being fired.

You won't be surprised to hear that LaMDA is *not* sentient. But while much coverage of AI has focused on what machines are thinking, little attention has been paid to what we are thinking when we interact with them. And if we don't know that, then we'll never be able to use AI to its full potential.

"If we don't understand people's lay beliefs about AI and don't understand its psychology, we can technically design the best algorithm in the world – but people won't use it," says Dr Anne-Kathrin Klesse, professor in the Department of Marketing Management and a member of the Psychology of AI Lab.

Netflix, she points out, once offered a million dollars to anyone who could tweak its recommendations algorithm to increase uptake by ten per cent. "We did some research that showed you can increase click-through by more than ten per cent by employing user-based explanations," says Klesse. "For example, '*other customers also liked*' compared with '*because you liked*'. So it's not only about the technology, but how it is communicated."

Existing research overwhelmingly shows that we prefer advice from humans over AI, Klesse points out. "Particularly when it comes to medical advice. We think that a human doctor sees the whole person, but an AI does not recognise our uniqueness. We also think we understand how a human doctor diagnoses, whereas we don't know how the AI does it. Research on medical artificial intelligence such as that carried out by Romain Cadario, Assistant Professor at RSM, showed that acceptance of medical AI was greatly increased when transparency increased – when patients were given a leaflet explaining how the algorithm was built, for example."

But while this kind of transparency may help acceptance, it is not yet required in business regulation. Ting Li, Professor of Digital Business at RSM, says that in some parts of the world, 70 per cent of after-sales calls are already being made by robots – we just don't know it. "Companies have been using these speech chatbots to make after-sales calls for a long time, and now they are used in pre-sales as well. This means we don't necessarily know it's not a human, and if the call gets too complicated, the robot can say they will get a 'supervisor'. That will be a human. It hugely increases capacity – a robot can make 200 calls where a human can make 20. But now, it's up to the company whether they choose to disclose that you're speaking to an AI."

These chatbots are only made possible by recent AI's mastery of language. "Open AI managed to make ChatGPT sound more like a human, much better than before, which is why we like it," says Li. "We also like buying from humans, or potentially digital humans. In e-commerce in Asia, for example, livestreaming is booming. People watch the seller, either real-human or digital-human, and interact with them in the chat, so it feels personalised. The next logical step is a digital human. Research shows people buy almost as much from an avatar as a real person. It's still expensive to make a digital human, but then you could be selling 24 hours a day..."

For Mathijs Gast (MSc Business Information Management, 2017), this kind of automation is not just desirable – it's vital for the economy of the future. He and fellow graduate Marcus Groeneveld (MSc Business Information Management, 2018) run Freeday, a company which provides AI-powered 'digital employees' for a range of customer service interactions and Know Your Customer identity-verification processes. "Productivity has been stagnating in the West," says Gast. "If we want to keep generating the wealth we're used to, we need to automate. Companies report labour shortages, and our workforce is ageing." »







**Above:**  
**Mathijs Gast**  
believes that AI  
will boost flagging  
productivity in the West.



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## Little attention has been paid to what we are thinking when we interact with AI



**Professor Ting Li** says that most of us don't realise when we are speaking to an AI.

# While

many of us are fine with a bot sorting out our customer service issues, most people feel much more strongly about the possibility of AI taking our jobs. But Gast argues that this animosity is misplaced. "At Freeday, we're excited by the idea of taking the robots out of humans," he says. "By this we mean removing the repetitive, low-value, mundane parts of people's work. We believe this will make work more rewarding, by freeing people up for the more interesting stuff. In retail, for example, if the AI is logging returns, it means that humans are freed up to look after complex customer care issues."

And although efficiency is part of the motivation for companies to harness AI, Gast says that in the past six years he has not seen jobs lost to robots in the companies he works with. He has, however, seen reduced staff turnover. "It's important to make the people whose work is changing part of the implementation," he says. "It's not about being replaced by AI, it's about working hand in hand with it."

Li agrees. "Take ChatGPT," she says. "All jobs will be affected by it, that's true. But we should be thinking about how it can add value. As a business school professor, ChatGPT could draft and reply to my emails, and grade essays, if I make the criteria clear enough. And then I'm freed up to come up with innovative research ideas, collaborate with colleagues or mentor students – things ChatGPT cannot do. It's about learning how to use it – what to input, and how to be critical of its response. We are teaching this to students too."

This means a societal shift. "If work becomes more complex and challenging," says Gast, "there will be a need for education and re-skilling of the workforce." It's already happening: augmented and virtual reality is blurring the boundaries between human and AI, says Li. For example, augmented reality has been embraced by employees at China Southern Airlines. "A human used to carry out a thorough plane safety inspection carrying a sheaf of papers as a checklist. Now they are using AR glasses, enhanced with AI. The accuracy is higher, and employees love it because they can easily prove they have performed the check and/or correction."

So, might AI have other beneficial effects on our minds – such as making us more intelligent? Klesse is not sure. "The difference between ChatGPT and Google is that Google presents options, but ChatGPT presents a solution. In terms of future impacts on our brains, there is some evidence from research into search engines to suggest that people don't remember as well when they know they will be able to find the answer. Who remembers phone numbers anymore, for example? Do we know our cities less well if we use Google Maps?"

Gast believes that it will possibly affect our recall. "For example, whether we can name all the cities of the world – the kind of rote learning we did at school. But how useful is that? In some ways it could make us lazier, but we're also seeing it make us more capable of working collaboratively, with humans as well as AI. The mental models are different – more like a gaming framework. And ChatGPT is making writing code or complex points of law accessible to everyone. It gives us all superpowers!"

When it comes to AI, it's not us versus them, concludes Klesse. Instead, we need to focus on the quality of our human-AI interactions. "We tend to see algorithms and AI as separate to us – algorithms versus humans, rather than humans working with algorithms. But AI doesn't exist in a vacuum – we created it. We could shut it down tomorrow if we wanted to, but we don't, because it's an extremely valuable support. Instead of focusing on it taking over, or taking our jobs, it might be more useful to acknowledge ourselves as being the drivers, because then we could focus on our inputs and control, such as regulation." ■

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PHOTO: JOHN VANE

RSM - a force for positive change





# Futureland

## Saving the world will take funding

*How do you spark innovation in emerging markets? Find new ways to make sure that brilliant ideas can get investment, says Meeran Malik.*



**Picture this: you've developed a groundbreaking startup idea**

with the potential to revolutionise lives – perhaps even the world. However, if you live in an emerging market, are female, or belong to an underrepresented group such as the unbanked, the odds are stacked against you in securing funding. Underdeveloped funding infrastructure or prevailing biases in existing structures lead to a skewed selection process for funding allocation. So it's crucial to address these funding disparities in emerging markets.

Consider the South-East Asian markets of Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, where there are many determined entrepreneurs creating startups to improve people's daily lives. A significant proportion of these are fintech startups, reflecting the region's demographics: they have many unbanked individuals. My venture, Seedefy, acts as a conduit to these high-impact, high-potential startups in emerging markets. We provide a decentralised marketplace that bridges them with global investors.

We leverage blockchain and smart contracts in alignment with key principles of enterprise blockchain. This allows us to be more transparent, to foster community building, and to expedite scalability. The decentralised nature of our platform reinstates ownership to its active participants, reinforcing a sense of empowerment.

Of course, transparency and due diligence are key. We ensure that participating companies are diligently vetted through our partners or ourselves. We also consistently enquire about their alignment with

**Meeran Malik**  
(MSc Finance and Investments, 2012)  
is founder and CEO of Seedefy.



### **Verification is vital in bridging funding gaps in these markets**

the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This is crucial, as we align these startups with global investors who have specific mandates, underscoring the importance of these development goals.

And we place a strong emphasis on community engagement. Verification is vital in bridging the funding gaps in these markets.

Startups in certain regions may pose a higher risk, due to less established governance compared to developed countries. It can be challenging, for instance, to verify the operation and legal registration of an agritech startup in a remote village. This is where the local community members on the platform become very important – be it local legal professionals, accountants, or industry-specific experts such as farmers. Our goal is to foster local businesses and encourage cross-cultural collaboration while ensuring thorough local-level due diligence. These community members aid in validating the accuracy of the information that startups provide to our platform. By focusing on the funding gap, we aim to democratise funding through our decentralised ecosystem. There is a lot of great innovation happening in these spaces. Our mission is to propel these brilliant ideas onto the next stage where they can truly make an impact. ■



» To find out more about Seedefy, visit [think.do.rsm.nl/seedefy](http://think.do.rsm.nl/seedefy) or scan the QR code



**FOSSIL FUELS  
MASS CONSUMPTION  
POLLUTION  
OCEAN PLASTIC  
BIODIVERSITY LOSS**

## ***The lowdown*** **Transition thinking**

*Businesses are entering a new age of uncertainty. Professor Derk Loorbach says it's time to face it head on.*

WORDS: LUCY JOLIN / ILLUSTRATION: ULLA PUGAARD



**How do you boost an economy** after the devastation of a world war? Governments in 1946 thought they knew the answer. Maximise production, using fossil fuels, and encourage mass consumption. The result was lots of jobs and progress. What's not to like? Well, there is one

very big, uncomfortable fact, says Derk Loorbach, Professor of Socio-Economic Transitions and Director of the Dutch Research Institute for Transitions. All that progress has come at the expense of other people, and the planet. Now the reckoning is here.

"There is no future in the current business model," says Loorbach. "This is an obvious scientific fact, because of the existential problems the model creates – ecological collapse, climate change, biodiversity loss, social and economic inequalities and so on. Our fossil fuel linear economy is therefore moving out of equilibrium. Alternatives are developing and becoming competitive. Business as usual is impossible, so we are likely to see global shifts at scale within the next ten years."

But it is possible to change your business for the better, so you're not just getting by but getting ahead. And Loorbach and his co-writers have outlined their ideas in *Adapt to Survive: Business transformation in a time of uncertainty*, a brief written for the UN Environment Programme, to show you how.

Transition thinking starts with reflection, says Loorbach. Look at yourself in a broader context and start talking to stakeholders, your community, your sector and those that inspire you around the world – not just your own people. "Start a new conversation to explore your desired transition, while letting go of unsustainable practices and dependencies. Create new alliances and coalitions, and you create a living narrative of change."



**RENEWABLE ENERGY  
SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING  
CLEAN AIR AND WATER  
CIRCULAR ECONOMY  
REVERSE AND RESTORE**



Then move to action. Consider how your business's service, product or value could be reconfigured in a social and ecologically friendly way as 'nature positive'. Along with contributing to renewable energy generation – or soil, land and water clean-up and restoration – the business should also consider how its model contributes to social value, such as establishing a basic income or bringing more people into the labour market. "And then translate that future business vision, in small steps, back to the present day," says Loorbach. "You may already be doing some aspects of it. But you should be creating more space for new elements, while also starting to proactively phase out those unsustainable elements."

Your business is likely to be operating within a whole new context, says Loorbach. What might it look like, for example, if health and sustainability become more important than economic growth? What might a different model of innovation look like, as opposed to current practices which only seek to optimise the current model?

This leads, he says, to a different kind of narrative, which changes the organisation's strategic conversation. "Often, the question becomes how the organisation as a whole can become a transition leader, creating a sustainable and just market. That leads to strategic lobbying, working with your investors to not only further your own business model but help align other market actors as well. That's when it becomes really market-shaping – when you move from individual leadership, to strategic leadership within the organisation, to a strategic leadership in the market."

And there's a practical aspect to transition, says Loorbach: you'll be ahead of the pack when shocks start to arrive, such as the EU banning a raw material. "It is more and more likely that things like Covid, wars, droughts, political landslides and migration issues will occur. These are all indicators of the last phase of this linear, fossil fuel extractive model economy."

Of course, nobody is denying that changing everything your business does is a huge challenge. After all, the majority of companies have optimised their business model and everything that goes with that – value chain, stakeholder network, expertise – within the current economic model. Loorbach acknowledges that transition thinking is a whole new way of thinking. It's slightly scary. But it's also hugely exciting.

"Transition demands that businesses engage in critical self-reflection on their own entanglement with an unsustainable and unjust economic model," he says. "And then start asking: not 'where can we improve?', but 'where are we? Is our model

## **Create new alliances and coalitions and you create a living narrative of change**

unsustainable? What parts of the business model are not future-proofed? Are we dependent on fossil fuels or fossil relations? Are we dependent on linear use in production and consumption of resources? Are we creating unjust or negative social effects?"

And while asking the fundamental question – "are we future proof?" – can be painful, the process of reparation and self-transformation that comes from it can be hugely positive. "If you do that in an open and organised way, it generates a huge amount of creativity, innovation and ownership within and around your organisation. Of course, people will fight back. But the time to start thinking differently is now." ■

# Alumni life

## Spreading the word

*The Dutch Caribbean RSM chapter is using its skills, knowledge and network to benefit the wider region.*



**Aldo Silvano**  
(MBA, 2020)



**Eugene Rhuggenaath**  
(MBA/MBI 1998)

**When RSM alumni come together**, they can bring about incredible positive change – in their sectors, their communities, and in wider society. That's the message from Eugene Rhuggenaath, former prime minister of Curaçao and RSM advisory board member (MBA/MBI, 1998). He is a longstanding contributor to the Dutch Caribbean RSM chapter and is passionate about using alumni expertise for the good of the region.

"For example, if government needs the latest thinking about the circular economy, there's a vast amount of experience and knowledge within the RSM community," he says. "They create a convergence between business, government and academics. More and more, solutions for these daunting challenges need a scientific, academic basis."

So when consultant Aldo Silvano (MBA, 2020) became head of the chapter, he was determined to not just support his fellow alumni, but also spread the word about RSM to the wider community. "It's a global brand with superb academic rigour – so I want students here in the Dutch Caribbean to see the incredible benefits a business education like this brings," he says.

To that end, Silvano regularly visits local schools, giving career and further education advice. "We talk about what university can do for you and what to expect. And we also encourage students to use our alumni network. If a student is interested in banking, for example, we can put them in touch with an alum in the industry."

The chapter also holds regular traditional social events, which bring together old and new alumni. "One of the biggest benefits of going to RSM is the camaraderie you build," says Silvano. "If I get an email from anyone connected with RSM, I open the email. I find there is an unspoken and sincere willingness to help each other."

That camaraderie is already having a real impact – particularly around efforts to drive sustainability in the region. This August, Rhuggenaath will collaborate on an executive masterclass series, Sustainability on Curaçao, along with Iwan Zunder (Business Administration, 1999) and Aixa Ostiana (MSc Accounting, Auditing and Control, 2012). The focus will be on leadership and strategy in sustainability, taking a practical and local approach.

"In my career, I have seen that while you can have a lot of knowledge and experience in a particular subject, the difference is made by leadership," says Rhuggenaath. "And that is what RSM develops – not only good businesspeople, but leadership that can help us resolve the universal challenges that are facing humanity and the planet. Consider your alumni chapter as the ideal place to get inspired!" ■

» **Inspired?** RSM has alumni chapters across the world, from Sydney to South Korea. To find your local chapter, visit [thinkdo.rsm.nl/go-global](http://thinkdo.rsm.nl/go-global) or scan the QR code.



**Right:**  
The Dutch Caribbean chapter wants to reach out across the region.



***If government needs access to the latest thinking, there's a vast amount of knowledge within the RSM community***





Words: Lucy Jolin. Illustration: Studio Pong

# Only connect

*When you mentor an RSM student, everybody wins.*

**Looking for a way to give back?** Connect with new talent? Develop your skills? Then join RSM's thriving (and award-winning) MentorMe community. "Mentoring an RSM student is a fantastic engagement opportunity," says Alumni Relations Manager Bruno Hasa. "In fact, I was so impressed that I signed up to be a mentor through the programme myself!"

Signing up is easy: just go to RSM's MentorMe page. You'll then be asked to fill out a LinkedIn-style profile with as much detail as possible, such as your sector, experience and interests. Students search the database for a mentor with relevant skills, and are presented with a list of suitable matches. It's then up to the student to select a mentor from the list, contact them and arrange a time to talk.

If you're concerned that mentoring might be too much of a time commitment, don't worry: you can sign up to do as much or as little as you like.

## **Mentoring is a brilliant way to give back and hone your managerial skills**

"The system is very flexible," says Hasa. "You can do a single short consultation with one student, build up a relationship with the same student, or you can choose to do multiple consultations with different students. It's entirely up to you."

And the benefit to students is huge: along with access to experience, they get credits on certain courses, too. "Mentoring is a fantastic learning experience for both mentor and mentee," says Hasa. "It's a brilliant way to give back, hone your managerial and interpersonal skills – and to stay in touch with the younger generation." ■



» To find out more about MentorMe and to signup, visit [thinkdo.rsm.nl/mentoring](http://thinkdo.rsm.nl/mentoring) or scan the QR code

# What's on for RSM alumni

## Join the celebrations

*This special Lustrum year is packed with festivities, activities and events both in-person and online. You're all invited – so save all the dates!*

**Below:**  
**Family reunion**  
Alumni Relations  
Director Sue Martin  
speaks at the EUR  
London alumni  
event in London.

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### ALL YEAR

#### EUR Lustrum

Come and celebrate 110 years of Erasmus University Rotterdam with special events planned throughout the year.

» **To find out more**, turn to page 2, and for all the latest news, visit [thinkdo.rsm.nl/lustrum-110](https://thinkdo.rsm.nl/lustrum-110) or scan the QR code.



### 8/11/23

#### Dies Natalis

Students, alumni, colleagues and Rotterdammers – everyone is welcome to join in the festivities as Erasmus University Rotterdam reaches the day of its 110th anniversary.

» **Visit** [thinkdo.rsm.nl/dn-2024](https://thinkdo.rsm.nl/dn-2024) or scan the QR code to find out more.



### 11/01/24

#### New Year's Drinks

Reunite with your fellow classmates at this friendly, informal event in Rotterdam and celebrate the New Year in style!

» **Visit** [thinkdo.rsm.nl/new-year-2024](https://thinkdo.rsm.nl/new-year-2024) or scan the QR code for more details.



### 14/04/24

#### Erasmus Charity Run

An official part of the Rotterdam Marathon, the Erasmus Charity Run is the perfect chance to get fit and raise money to support important causes and the next generation.

» **Sign up at** [thinkdo.rsm.nl/charity-run-2024](https://thinkdo.rsm.nl/charity-run-2024) or scan the QR code to find out more.



### 13/06/24

#### HeartBeat Festival

Come and see out the Lustrum year at the HeartBeat Festival. It's all about fun, vibrancy, meeting friends, sustainability, colourfulness, entrepreneurship, inclusion, celebration and connecting with each other! The campus will be transformed into a summer festival with outdoor live music, food trucks and entertainment.

» **Find out more** at [thinkdo.rsm.nl/heartbeat-2024](https://thinkdo.rsm.nl/heartbeat-2024) or scan the QR code.



### ALL YEAR

#### Events where you are

Every year we organise dozens of social, networking and masterclass events around the world, just for alumni. In the last year we've been to Amsterdam, Toronto, Cape Town, Shanghai, São Paulo, Barcelona and more.

» **To see where** we're going next year, visit [thinkdo.rsm.nl/alumni-events](https://thinkdo.rsm.nl/alumni-events) or scan the QR code.







**Richard Tessell**  
(MBA, 2011)

**What's your role?**

Marketing Director, Automation & IT Solutions – N. America Lab Diagnostics, Siemens Healthineers.

**What are you doing now?**

I recently started an exciting new role with Siemens Healthineers as a part of their diagnostics business, where I am responsible for North America Marketing of IT and Automation solutions. It's an area which is ripe for innovation and rich with opportunities to drive improvements that are going to be fruitful for the whole of the business.

**RSM alumni should contact me for...**

Advice. I've enjoyed mentoring and being mentored over the years. It has been among some of the most rewarding experiences in my life.

**Who would you like to meet?**

People that are different from me. It's exciting having a conversation with someone whose life experience or world view is different from your own.



**Floris van der Breggen**  
(MiM, 2016)

**What's your role?**

Founder and Chief Executive Officer at SyncVR Medical.

**What are you doing now?**

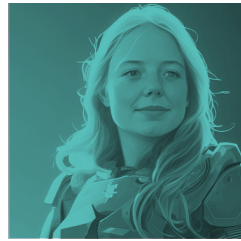
In 2018, I founded SyncVR Medical, the largest extended reality (XR) platform for healthcare in Europe, active in 200 hospitals in six countries. We're on a mission to improve healthcare with virtual and augmented reality. I want to scale up the impact this technology has on people that need it – from VR to reduce medication for patients with chronic pain to replacing traditional physiotherapy during Covid rehab.

**Where do you want to be in ten years?**

I want to be in a pioneering role, exploring new ways of having a positive impact on the planet.

**Who would you like to meet?**

Anyone pursuing their entrepreneurial dream, as well as anyone who is involved in healthtech.



**Anne van Weezenbeek**  
(MSc Strategic Entrepreneurship, 2022)

**What's your role?**

Founding partner at Imagine Me and Teaching Assistant on RSM's MSc in Strategic Management.

**What are you doing now?**

I work for Imagine Me, an AI startup with deep Rotterdam-Delft academic roots, which aims to establish itself as a leader in AI portrait generation. I am also a Teaching Assistant for the Master's programme in Strategic Management, and pursue mathematics and engineering courses at the TU Delft.

**Where do you want to be in ten years?**

I'd like to establish myself as a successful tech entrepreneur, creating innovative and impactful technology solutions that solve real-world problems and bring value to customers.

**Who would you like to meet?**

I welcome anyone who would like to reach out. I am eager to connect with people who can help me develop, while providing value to them in return.



**Jorik Bremer**  
(MSc Business Administration, 2002)

**What's your role?**

Sales Director, EMEA at Cropin.

**What are you doing now?**

Cropin is set on digitising the global agricultural industry. We are backed by some great investors, including Google and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Since 2010, more than 250 B2B customers in 92 countries have used our technology to digitise 26 million acres of farmland.

**How are you making a positive change?**

I'm excited to solve the most pressing agricultural challenges. I have an opportunity to contribute to solving other planet-scale issues such as food insecurity and wastage, climate change and supply chain disruptions that are core to Cropin's mission.

**Who would you like to meet?**

Anyone working on related areas – and I'm happy to hear from anyone who wants to talk experience, advice and networking.



**Monique Jagmohansingh**  
(IBA, 2008)

**What's your role?**

Founder and designer at fashion label Monique Singh, Head of Innovations Creative at Rituals Cosmetics.

**What are you doing now?**

Leading new product development at Rituals Cosmetics while starting my own fashion label, Monique Singh. It takes inspiration from my Dutch-Surinamese-Indian cultural heritage to create a new universe in fashion.

**What are your areas of expertise?**

I am a digital-savvy and creative brand-builder, a strategic commercial expert and a fast analytical thinker. Along with my 15 years of experience in luxury, fashion, beauty and FMCG, leading end-to-end product design and commercial innovation programmes, I've also been an all-round entrepreneur for the past three years.

**Who would you like to meet?**

Passionate people who dream big – and have the guts and perseverance to keep chasing those dreams.

## Would like to meet...

New job? New opportunity? New idea? Tell your fellow alumni what you're up to – and who you'd like to meet.



» Want to connect with fellow alumni? Email [alumni@rsm.nl](mailto:alumni@rsm.nl) or scan the QR code.



# Out of office

## Blaak Market

*Aashna Pandya loves to wander, chat and shop in the lively Rotterdam market that offers a welcome taste of home.*

WORDS: JO CAIRD / PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN VANE



**I go to Blaak Market** every Saturday, and sometimes on Tuesdays too. It's super loud and lively: stallholders shouting out products and prices, little children running around, dogs barking. It's right in front of the Markthal, which is one of the most touristy places in Rotterdam, and the Blaak Market is full of locals, so it's such a contrast. Everyone's filing past the stalls and if you want to stop and buy something you have to sort of push your way through. I grew up in India and it reminds me of markets at home – hustling and bustling, but not rowdy.

I discovered the market in the first few days after moving to Rotterdam. It was before I'd found an apartment, so I was staying in a hotel in the city centre, spending my days exploring by myself. One day I came across Blaak and it's been part of my Rotterdam routine ever since. I used to have to take a tram to get there, but now I'm lucky enough to live a ten-minute walk away. Visiting Blaak these days, I feel like a local – until I open my mouth!

I'm not exactly an early bird – I go to Blaak around 1pm and always visit the same stalls for fruit and vegetables. A lot of the stalls specialise, but I usually prefer this particular large one that has everything I need: aubergines, mushrooms, courgettes, sweet peppers. I love to cook. There's just something about sitting down to eat the meal that you just made. I couldn't cook before I came to the Netherlands, but I've picked things up from different people.

Growing up in India, buying vegetables at the supermarket wasn't really a thing we did in my family and I've inherited a mindset about supporting your local community where you can. At home, though, coriander and chillis are usually thrown in for free – when my mother found out that you have to pay for them here she was flabbergasted.

I get my lunch at a Turkish *gozleme* stall – my go-to is the spinach and feta wrap. It's run by a family – father, mother and daughter – and it's just very cute. They speak to me in English, which I appreciate. It's super-cheap as well.

The market is on whatever the weather. And actually, if it's a rainy day, I find it a good incentive to get out of the house. It raises my spirits. I'm so bad with umbrellas here, though – they turn inside out whenever I use them – so I just put my hood up. I don't mind getting a bit wet. I'm always so happy to be there. ■



**Aashna Pandya**  
(MSc Marketing Management, 2023) picks the freshest produce.



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# Executive Education

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5 October  
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3 days  
[www.rsm.nl/im](http://www.rsm.nl/im)

9 October  
**Diploma Programme in General Management**  
3 days  
[www.rsm.nl/dpgm](http://www.rsm.nl/dpgm)  
(also 7 Dec, 18 Mar '24)

9 October  
**Digital Strategy**  
3 days  
[www.rsm.nl/ds](http://www.rsm.nl/ds)

10 October  
**Communication with Power and Impact for Women**  
1 day  
[www.rsm.nl/cfw](http://www.rsm.nl/cfw)

16 October  
**Co-creation & Stakeholder Engagement**  
3 days  
[thinkdo.rsm.nl/cc](http://thinkdo.rsm.nl/cc)

### NOVEMBER

2 November  
**Leading with Presence**  
2 days  
[www.rsm.nl/lp](http://www.rsm.nl/lp)

6 November  
**Leading with Decision Driven Analytics**  
3 days  
[www.rsm.nl/ldda](http://www.rsm.nl/ldda)

16 November  
**Employee Communication**  
4 days  
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20 November  
**Digital Innovation**  
3 days  
[www.rsm.nl/di](http://www.rsm.nl/di)

21 November  
**Negotiating for Success: Women, Careers and Business**  
1 day  
[www.rsm.nl/nfs](http://www.rsm.nl/nfs)

### DECEMBER

4 December  
**Make Strategy Work**  
3 days  
[www.rsm.nl/msw](http://www.rsm.nl/msw)

4 December  
**Team Leadership**  
3 days  
[www.rsm.nl/tl](http://www.rsm.nl/tl)

12 December  
**Sustainable Finance**  
3 days  
[www.rsm.nl/sf](http://www.rsm.nl/sf)

### JANUARY 2024

29 January  
**Winter Foundation Course in Corporate Communication**  
5 days  
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### MARCH

4 March  
**Crisis Communication**  
3 days  
[www.rsm.nl/crisis-communication](http://www.rsm.nl/crisis-communication)

### APRIL

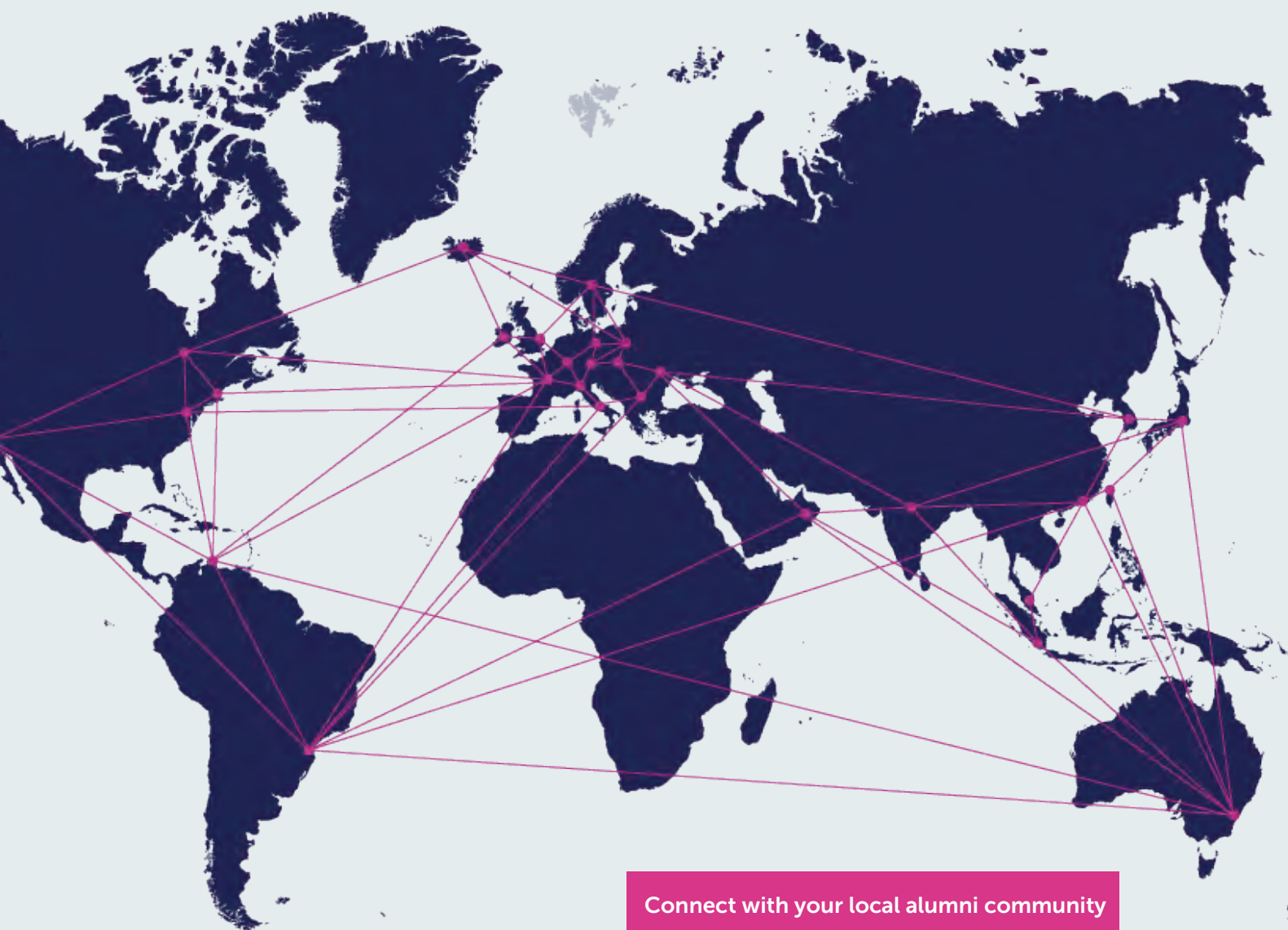
2 April  
**Corporate Branding**  
4 days  
[www.rsm.nl/cc](http://www.rsm.nl/cc)

15 April  
**Navigating the Stakeholder Media Landscape**  
4 days  
[www.rsm.nl/open](http://www.rsm.nl/open)

### JUNE

Date TBC  
**Summer Foundation Course in Corporate Communication**  
4 days  
[www.rsm.nl/sccc](http://www.rsm.nl/sccc)

# 35 local chapters in 28 countries



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