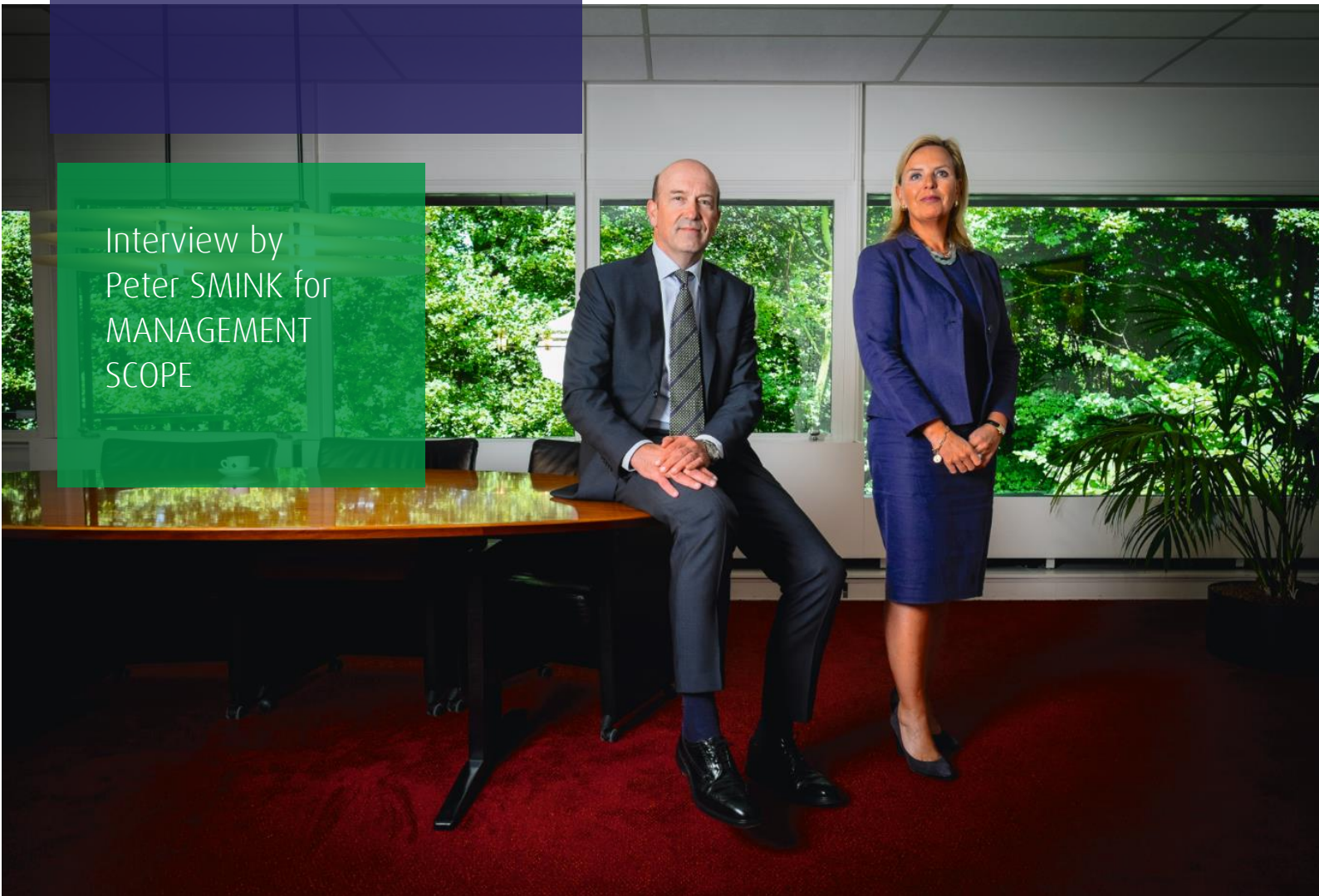


New Leadership

The Perfect
Candidate, Please

Viewpoint

Interview by
Peter SMINK for
MANAGEMENT
SCOPE



Mgmt.

SCOPE



Amrop

Leaders For What's Next

Interview

Peter Smink, CEO and CFO,
Nuon.

Text

Hans Pieter van Stein Callenfels

Photography

David van Dam

Published with the kind
permission of
MANAGEMENT SCOPE

www.managementscope.nl

New Leadership

The Perfect Candidate, Please

A director role is no longer filled by calling around your network, say Eelco van Eijck and Nicolette Zandbergen of executive search partnership Amrop. A big pool of talent exists in unexpected places. You need to know how to find it.

Executive search is a matter of having a big network, right?

No, say Eelco van Eijck and Nicolette Zandbergen of Amrop firmly. For Amrop, the operative word is the last one: *search*. Van Eijck calculates: "Every year, around 190 000 students in the Netherlands go to college or university. Four years later, more than two thirds have a Bachelor or Master's degree. Of course, not all of them become top executives, far from it, but still, these are big numbers of talented people, also bigger than before, because of the influx of foreign talent into the Netherlands. You can never get to know all of them physically. That is why search is such an important part of our work."

His colleague Nicolette Zandbergen confirms: "If, as a company, you want to be ready for the future, you need top talent. Especially the unknown talent, the talent that isn't on the standard lists. Finding these candidates depends very much on your search strategy."

Van Eijck (56) and Zandbergen (50) are Partners at Amrop, a global executive search partnership with over 70 offices in more than 50 countries worldwide. Together with five other partners and supported by research consultants and personal assistants, they constitute Amrop's Netherlands office. Like all Amrop Partners worldwide, they have their own domain of expertise. Van Eijck is a medical doctor but has a background as an international manager in FMCG. Zandbergen worked for several years as an international

“Major transitions demand leaders with entrepreneurial capacities.”

partner and business leader in management consulting and HR, and now specializes in professional services and corporate functions.

At Amrop, they are permanently focused on finding the *Leaders For What's Next*. This is the tagline of the organization, and immediately explains their emphasis on the right search strategy. If you want to help companies to be ready for the future, you have to look beyond traditional approaches. Filling an executive position by making a few calls within an existing network is outdated, say van Eijck and Zandbergen. This fast moving world has not only sharpened leadership competences, it has also broadened the range of talent that is on offer. So you need to know where and how to find it. And that is where Amrop consistently does a better job, say its partners in conversation with Peter Smink, CEO and CFO of Nuon.

**You look for leaders of the future on behalf of your clients.
What do you search for in particular?**

Van Eijck: 'Nowadays, true entrepreneurial capabilities are often asked for. Many companies are facing major transitions as a consequence of digitization, the need to innovate, to manage risk or an ambitious growth agenda, for example. This results in a need for leaders who are able to transform companies. It requires management and change capacity, but also entrepreneurship. What helps in these search journeys is that we are entrepreneurs as well. Amrop is a *lean and mean* organization. We have around 200 Partners who are all entrepreneurs and this often matches well with our clients and candidates. At the same time, we work for many young companies in a phase of growth. They need people with a more 'managerial' profile. We find these new leaders for them.'

The fact that companies have different demands for their leaders also has consequences for the demands made on you as headhunters. What is the new world asking of you, as professionals?

Van Eijck: 'It is extremely important that as an executive search partner we ourselves have management experience. At Amrop, all Partners have worked at senior management level, almost always in an international context. It means we have a good grasp of the board dynamics in a company that is undergoing change.'

EELCO VAN EIJCK (56)

Education

Medicine, University of Leiden
Executive Development, IMD

Career

2015 - today

Managing Partner,
Amrop Executive Search

2003 - 2014

Partner, Amrop Executive Search

2001 - 2003

General Manager Europe, Del Monte Foods

1999 - 2001

General Manager Germany, Frito-Lay
(PepsiCo)

1997 - 2001

VP Marketing & Sales, PepsiCo

1994 - 1997

Reckitt Benckiser, various sales and
management functions

1988 - 1994

National Account Manager,
Procter & Gamble

Other positions

Guest lecturer, Executive 2.0 Program at
Erasmus University

Interests

Cycle racing, skiing, football

At home

In a partnership, two children

Zandbergen: 'Through their experience, our partners have a lot of industry knowledge, on both national and international level. Each knows his or her industry inside out, the related business and operating models, the industry-specific challenges, the trends and the most important players. We speak their language, so we can level quickly. When you're determining the appropriate search strategy to identify potential candidates it helps to ask: 'what is the origin of those candidates you don't yet know? In which other sectors will we find candidates that could thrive here?' We regularly work in teams of two partners on a client assignment, in order to combine industry knowledge with functional content knowledge.'

Van Eijck: 'I have been in this profession for thirteen years now. Many people tell me: you must have a big network. Of course, we are *connected* with clients and candidates, with the market, but our biggest challenge is finding potential new leaders outside the traditional frameworks. Everyone can work with digital tools. But making a good match is a specialism, and it takes a certain associative ability, thinking power, and experience with board dynamics.'

Can you give an example of the approach?

Van Eijck: 'A while back the CEO of a large global facilities company asked whether we could help him find a managing director for the Netherlands. During a detailed briefing from the CEO, many aspects of their business model came up.

In facilities, it is pretty specific: it's a low margin business, with high staffing levels, distance management, it's a tender business and revolves around *hospitality* – you want your people to deliver a certain level of service. On the basis of that checklist, we mapped a number of industries with the same features. Then you arrive at public transport, but also at express delivery services, food and hospitality, or retail – for example supermarket chains also have to take care to deliver the same service and hospitality in all of their outlets.

“They are not necessarily the most well-known names, so it is up to us to properly position the company and the role and to convince the candidate about the opportunity.”

Next, we mapped and approached all the ‘numbers one and two’ in the relevant organizations. Many were surprised, but we had a well-developed story that impressed them at the first contact. Eventually we spoke with twenty candidates, reviewed seven of them with the client, and invited a selection for an interview with the client. The final candidate was in that selection.’

Zandbergen: ‘In this sense we also play an important ambassador role for the companies we represent. The majority of our clients are large mid-caps, smaller large caps, family businesses or private equity owned companies. They are not necessarily the most well-known names, so it is up to us to properly position the company and the role and to convince the candidate about the *opportunity*. This also indicates why certain companies need us – they are not always a known or strong brand. We help them to get their *employer brand* known.’

Van Eijck: ‘We are currently working on a search assignment for a fantastic company that makes products for the automotive industry. These products are often hidden in a car, unknown to us, but essential. The company has a strong CEO with a lot of spirit and vision, they innovate continuously, to the point that their latest invention is built into the latest models of several leading car brands. With a story like this, we try to convince the right people. Even though the position is not always seen as attractive in the first instance.’

Do specific things strike you when you talk to young talent? These are the leaders for the future, but what do you think about the new generation?

Van Eijck: ‘I regularly have discussions with young people. Sometimes I find that they remain on a superficial level. Let’s take Brexit as an example: there were major reasons why it was such a bad outcome for young people. But how did it happen? Because many young people did not vote, they did not dive into the subject matter and its consequences. Sometimes they are too casual. When I ask young and talented managers about their CV, they say: “go and look on LinkedIn, it’s all on there”. But of course that is not enough. LinkedIn is a listing of job titles. It says little about who you are.

Furthermore I notice that talented young people sometimes overestimate themselves. They think that they can easily handle a job as a sales or marketing director, but they have barely done the work themselves. As one of my board members once told me: *experience is a skill in itself*. A real CFO has been a book-keeper. A marketing director has analyzed Nielsen data and drafted reports. A sales director has

NICOLETTE ZANDBERGEN (50)

Education

Political Science, University of Leiden and University of Bologna

Career

2013 - today

Partner, Amrop Executive Search

2012

Sabbatical

1994 - 2011

Partner, Hewitt Associates (now Aon) in Amsterdam, Brussels, Chicago and Rotterdam. Various management positions, including global Account Executive, Head of Sales & Accounts, European Practice Leader and European Business Development Manager

1992 - 1993

Consultant recruitment and selection, Tènce Personeel & Projecten

Other positions

Member of the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) HR Committee

Interests

Sport (spinning, golf, skiing), nature, travelling and corporate thrillers

At home

Married

been a sales representative. You need that experience. Once you have it, you will never be surprised by the people that report to you.'

Zandbergen: 'What I see is that the next generation is inspired by servant leadership. You can tell by the type of questions they ask about a given role, team or company. What is the *purpose* of a company, how does it deal with topics such as sustainability and CSR, and above all, what is the dominant leadership style, how does the leader inspire his or her people or deal with stakeholders, and what is the *freedom to act*, in other words; what's my actual room to maneuver in this company? The traditional top-down directive model is truly outdated. Fortunately a lot of companies clearly get that.'

Van Eijck: 'At the same time I'd like to see a little more authenticity from the next generation. Show that you have talent. Not only in your job but also, for example, by being a fanatical sportsperson, doing something useful besides your studies, in associations, at your faculty, through volunteering work, etc. It's really not a bad thing to take a risk now and then, to differentiate yourself and to go off the beaten track.'

You both had heavyweight careers before you started to do this work. What makes this sector so attractive?

Zandbergen: 'It is clearly a people business, but with a strong business focus. We interact with clients at executive and board level, and partner with them on strategic issues. On the other hand we meet with interesting candidates who have fascinating experiences. Many things come together: business experience, organizational and client knowledge and also the human aspects. When we have presented a candidate after a careful evaluation and there is a match, it's very satisfying. We also try to help candidates forward. We coach them for example on questions regarding the next steps in their career, the added value of executive education, their personal presentation, their storyline as well as their interview skills. That is how you bring people to the next level.'

Van Eijck: 'We deal with phenomenal companies and talk with smart and interesting people. There is something to celebrate on a daily basis. It is all about hard work too: we conduct around seven hundred meetings per Partner per year. The image of executive search is that it's a 'sexy' job, with a lot of perks and lunches. That is probably true to a certain extent, but if you want to do it really well, you have to work in a disciplined way, and work hard.'

You say the job has changed considerably – the traditional old boys network is no more, it's far more about search. How do you approach your search assignments?

Zandbergen: 'There is an increasing emphasis on good *search governance* - the robustness and precision of the search process – and rightly so. In the past, when there was a vacancy a Supervisory Board Member would say: I know a firm, I will give them a ring. Nowadays, these processes are much more robust, transparent and structured. And that is a good thing.'

Van Eijck: 'We were recently in a pitch with three other firms. In these situations we have to make clear why we are the best choice for a specific assignment. In this case, it helped that we had experience in client's industry sector. Once we have won the assignment, we have to keep the search strategy on track. A good search has a certain structure, follows a certain process. That way we don't get the situation that candidates are introduced through all sorts of parties. In one of our recent CFO searches that was a risk, but fortunately we arranged it so that all the candidates were interviewed by us. We made a scorecard based on the position profile. We used this scorecard to assess all the interviewed candidates; the ones we had identified as well as those who were introduced by other parties, all evaluated based on the same criteria. Some candidates, however good they might have been, missed certain essential criteria and did not go through. You have to organize it professionally - there is no other way.'



"There is an increasing emphasis on good *search governance* - the robustness and precision of the search process – and rightly so. In the past, when there was a vacancy a Supervisory Board Member would say: I know a firm, I will give them a ring. Nowadays, these processes are much more robust, transparent and structured. And that is a good thing.'



How do you see the future of the job? Your sector is also being influenced by digitization.

Van Eijck: 'The time when managers will be fully digitized is still a long way off. We conduct *'non-algorithm search.'* We have a team of outstanding researchers that is permanently on a quest for new and good candidates. On every search we aim to identify a minimum of twenty new profiles that are not yet in our candidate database. That is really necessary if you want to help a company get to the next stage. And it remains primarily a human task.'

Zandbergen: 'I think so too. As I said earlier, this is a people business. We cannot over-emphasize the importance of the human aspect. This is certainly the case when you are assessing the match of a potential candidate with the organizational culture, the way decisions are made within the organization, or the future cooperation within a management team, the CEO or the Supervisory Board.'

Where do you stand in the playing field of Dutch executive search firms?

Van Eijck: 'We are the challenger in the market. Since we are an emerging player in a large global partnership, we have a lot of access. We are less tied up in agreements with large companies than the more established firms. Clients frequently say: we see Amrop fighting for us. We are a forward-looking organization, we have a lot to gain.'

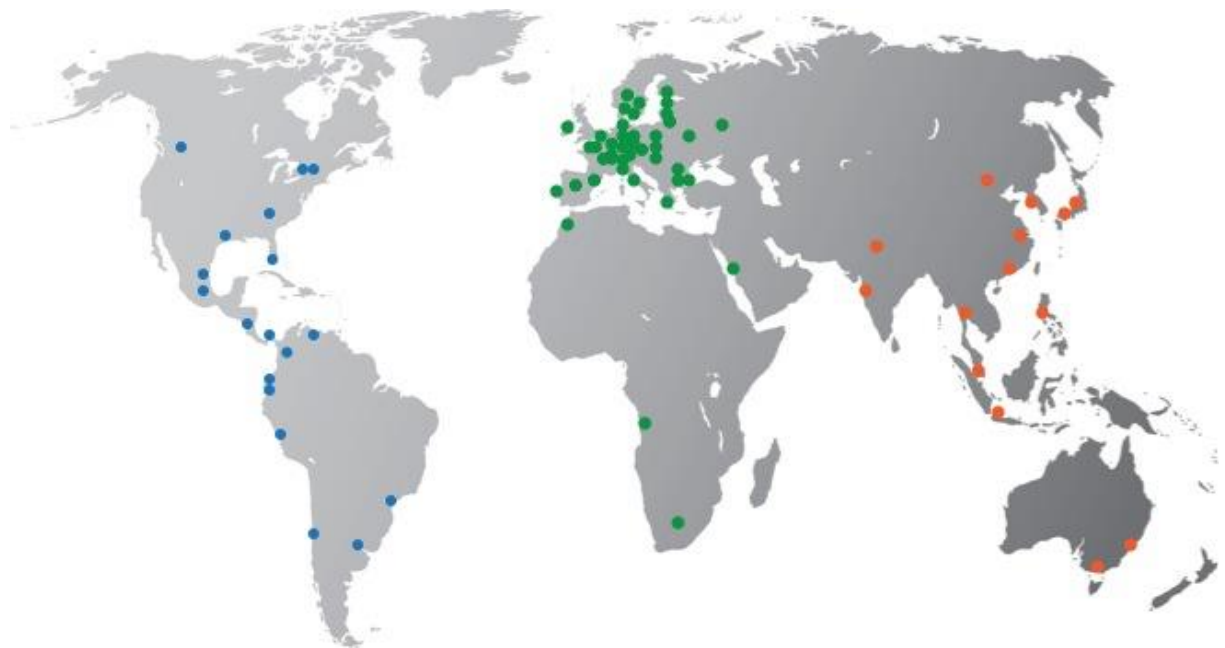
Zandbergen: '*We try harder!* This applies even more to the way we tackle a search. There's less circulation of the known profiles. This is also the case with regard to diversity at executive level. Clients increasingly want a woman for a top position but then they say: 'I don't know these candidates. Do they even exist?' Then we say: 'Of course they do, and we will find them for you.'

"We deal with phenomenal companies and talk with smart and interesting people. There is something to celebrate on a daily basis."

About Amrop

With over 70 offices in more than 50 countries, Amrop provides services in Executive Search, Leadership Assessment and Board Consulting. It is the largest partnership of its kind.

Amrop's Context Driven approach to executive search helps our clients find Leaders For What's Next, top talent, adept at working across borders in markets around the world.



www.amrop.com/offices