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Introduction

It's 2020. Corona is seeping through the streets. Governments decide to place their countries in lockdown to minimize the spread of the virus. Restaurants, sports venues, stores and theaters go on lockdown. People stay home as much as possible. And although business can largely continue to trade, it is done mostly from home.

As with Jim. Jim sits in the attic of his three-story row house in Waddinxveen behind his laptop. His wife Joyce is off today and has taken the kids to the deathly busy nature playground the Groenhoven Park, to allow Jim some undisturbed work time. He has to be able to concentrate on his work, or he will be reprimanded again and could be sent out of the job.

A week ago, he received a yellow card from his manager for noticing that he had spent an hour on YouTube during working hours. Jim's company requires him to be *dedicated* at his laptop between nine and five. They have installed the "productivity software" Hubstaff on all employees' laptops. As Hubstaff describes it on its own website, the software helps time-track colleagues to create a profitable business. Managers can take screenshots of employees' laptops in addition to tracking time worked. Real-time no less. Not only that, mouse and keyboard activity are checked and a GPS tracker is included, so you can't be at work unseen on the terrace or in another office building. And as Jim experienced, websites visited are also monitored. Because yes, you do want supreme efficiency from your highly paid staff.

Fortunately, Hubstaff itself does not think they offer a surveillance tool. It's simply an extension and amplifier of your management, according to the Director of Customer Experience. And it's easy, right? You never have to check in with each other again to ask how everyone is doing and what

everyone is up to. As Hubstaff puts it on its site, *Goodbye Check-ins, Hello Alerts*.

Jim is now toiling away in his shirt as Medior Supply Chain Coordinator to show that he does *comply with the work ethic protocols* created. He is punctual at the Teams meetings of the day, where he switches from legs-on-tables sessions to bilas (bilaterals) and the QBR (Quarterly Business Review). All of those meetings are reeeeeally important and everything is tightly reported in the company systems. The other day he had to fill out an employee satisfaction survey and prepare for his performance review, after which everything was neatly ticked off by hr and his manager.

Sometimes Jim wonders what he's doing.

And Jim is not the only one.

Anthropologist David Graeber wrote the 2018 book *Bullshit Jobs*, in which he quotes the great economist John Maynard Keynes, who predicted in 1930 that in the future people would only have to work fifteen hours because much of it could be taken over by technology. Graeber concludes that we have supplemented those fifteen hours with nonsensical jobs. As much as half of the work done in modern Western societies is bullshit. Graeber sees five types of nonsensical jobs:

1. *Flunkies*, who make their boss feel important (receptionists, door attendants).
2. *Goons*, who are instructed by their employers to hurt or deceive others (lobbyists, telemarketers).
3. *Duct Tapers*, people who temporarily fix something that can just be permanently fixed (programmers who extend existing code instead of reprogramming).

4. *Box Tickers*, who create the appearance that something useful has been done, when it hasn't (*corporate compliance officers*, survey administrators).
5. *Taskmasters*, who invent and manage new tasks for people who don't need or want them (middle management, leadership professionals).

Nonsensical jobs are everywhere. Work is done to do work, but not to get something done. Job playing.

Exactly the same can be said about the way organizations organize themselves. Most organizations maintain things, do things and expand on the most absurd practices, methodologies and theories. Practices that date back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where industrialization and slavery were not far apart. Indeed, the industrial revolution came about a century before the abolition of slavery. The way in which people were employed to promote the prosperity of a small group was no different then than it is now.

The supervisors (managers), the clocking in, the controls, the hierarchical layers, the rules, the protocols ... Many practices were introduced at the time to manage the then modern company. Companies today still feel that many of these practices *belong* that way. Leading to a modern slavery that in many cases we call "a working life. They ape what their former bosses, previous employers or old management educators and theorists have told them. And everyone seems to think it's normal.

They are playing company.

And this corporate play leads to nothing but what Jim experiences and the bullshit jobs that Graeber talks about. In turn, the bullshit jobs feed the bureaucracy and ineptitude we experience everywhere, and so we stay in a

continuous loop of Kafkaesque absurdity that we have to break out of sometime.

Whether that is possible?

Yes, it is.

We, Lennard and Cedric, met at the company Keytoe. Where we did our best to get rid of everything that has to do with 'playing company'. At Keytoe we keep as little records as possible, only what is required by law, but even in that we sometimes enter a gray area. For example, a fixed number of vacation days is mentioned on the employee contract, after which we immediately tell the new colleagues that they have an unlimited number of vacation days (or that they should know for themselves), because we do not keep track of the vacation days used. No hierarchical layers, no managers, no signs on the wall with our core values, no dress code, no working hours, no *security clearances*, because everyone has access to everything.

Just a group of people who make things together and help other companies with something, and ask for money to pay salaries and parties. And still sometimes we do things that, as far as we're concerned, are a little too much like corporate games (we're sick of it). But we keep questioning it, denouncing it, so that everyone starts asking whether something is helping, or whether we're doing it because other companies are doing it, or because it's always been that way.

And not just at Keytoe. We regularly come into other companies where we try to help cycle some more humanity inside. Often this comes down to holding up a mirror and making managers ask themselves why on earth they are doing what they are doing. Making them realize that they are actually doing what they have seen somewhere else, or learned at a management

school or course, without asking themselves what the point is and what the pitfalls are.

These things, this company playing, as far as we are concerned, must be stopped. This book is going to show you why, why things are so incomprehensibly absurd in organizations. Why many management practices should burn in purgatory. And why many of the things that are done in organizations make people and the world not better, but worse.

We put an alternative to that. A positive alternative with only the ingredients that are really necessary to organize in a meaningful way. A perspective that can help you focus on the really relevant matters in the future. As far as we are concerned, this is necessary.

That's why this book is here.

PART I.

Playing silly business

What happens, why it happens, why it doesn't help

1. Management theories and blindness

Imagine the following: a team of rowers wants to make it to the top. The coach decides to look at France, the soccer world champions, and to adopt the 4-4-2 formation that the French used to have success at the 2018 WORLD CUP in Russia, becoming world famous. Good luck, rowers!

Does this above piece make no sense? Indeed it does. But this is exactly what companies are doing that want to implement the Spotify model in their own organization. Just because you employ IT'ers like Spotify doesn't mean that the Spotify model is going to be the method for your bank. Rowers are athletes just like soccer players, but they are really playing a different game.

The old *scientific management theory*, conceived by Frederick Taylor in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and perfected by Henry Ford, was a very inspiring way to run your business. Developed in the Industrial Revolution from the need at that time to be able to produce enough for larger growing populations, the emphasis came to be on efficiency. How can we produce as efficiently as possible? Minimum cost, maximum result. And yes, that works if your goal is efficient production.

Because Ford became so successful with it, other companies assumed he had invented the formula for success. So, adopt that bite. Until it became standard for all companies to introduce hierarchy layers, have tight monitoring on hours worked, break down large amounts of work into small, bite-sized chunks performed by specialists, and have managers overseeing that work. However, it is forgotten that this model works well for assembly line work, but for more complex problems and products that require human creativity, it is not always the best method. Yet many hospitals, government

agencies, service companies and even schools are still very much set up on this.

And that is problematic. Applying management practices like scientific management theory in industries, businesses and organizations for which it is not intended helps no one. Nobody wants to feel like a product on an assembly line in a hospital or in a school. You want to be treated as a human being in places where the service is all about the human being. Workers choose such professions not because of the administrative operations and bureaucratic control principles they have to follow, but because of the human factor. Shortages in healthcare and education are mainly attributed to status and salary, but couldn't it also have to do with the mismatched way of organizing?

In the meantime, several other methods have been devised and tried. In the Netherlands, we know the Rhineland model, which originated in West Germany as a humane form of organizing within capitalism. Organizations adopted this, moving from shareholder-centric to stakeholder-centric. They replaced short-term profit thinking for long-term thinking, focused on preserving the future and delivering value to themselves and the rest of the world.

Sociocracy is a similar model that originated in the Netherlands. Kees Broeke coined it in 1926 and promoted sociocracy at the school he founded in Bilthoven. It only gained some notoriety when Gerard Endenburg adopted sociocratic principles in his company Endenburg Elektrotechniek BV in the late 1970s. Sociocracy assumes the equality of people, and attempts to place democracy in a model of governance where every vote counts.

Both the Rhineland model and sociocracy remained quite dormant. Few organizations adopted the ideas or adopted parts of them. They didn't make it into the mainstream of business management at all.

Only in the past two decades have truly new methodologies sprung up and been adopted by a large number of companies. In particular, Lean and Agile methodologies have taken off. Both are founded on principles that increase the well-being of people. The joke is that almost every organization uses Agile or Lean to manage projects in an even more efficient and effective way. Not necessarily to put human values higher on the priority list, at least, it doesn't have that effect by a long shot. The scientific management theory still runs deep.

The past few decades have also seen the emergence of modern organizational models that now seem to be slowly but surely gaining ground. Sociocracy 3.0, Holacracy and Semco Style as the three contenders right now. They have inspiring examples like Zappos and Semco, the Brazilian company run by Ricardo Semler. To operate the same and appear modern, companies are pouncing on such examples and trying to copy them. By the more expensive consulting firms, this is called *modern employment*.

The Dutch Buurtzorg is also an example for other Dutch and international healthcare providers, especially those organizations that offer district nursing. From far and wide, managers and directors of nursing organizations come to learn from Jos de Blok and his way of "not running" the business.

Some of those district nursing organizations are summarizing the practices of Buurtzorg into self-management and self-directed teams, and draping that over their own organizations. With all its consequences. Rotterdam's Laurens, one of the nursing organizations that tried this (among many, many others), went faltering. Instead of the nurses at Laurens getting calmer, like at Buurtzorg, they only got busier. Why? Because the management still worked the old-fashioned way and it also had to approve the final decisions the nurses made. And the nurses had to learn a method

that was not yet well understood by their former managers. As a result, Laurens reversed the plans and blamed self-management because it didn't work for them. Strange isn't it?

All named methods and forms of work all have good intentions. The problem is that scientific management theory still rules, and all managers and CEO's read a management summary of a new method and think they understand the basics, then pour it out over their organization. In doing so, they demand that their colleagues change, but they themselves would rather not. As long as the thinking is not lived by the CEO, a new management method will not live in the organization and is doomed to fail. In a nutshell: imitation does not work.

Speaking of monkeys. Copying a style or methodology blindly doesn't work, because after a while we don't remember why we do it that way, with all the consequences that entails. And the fact that we don't learn to think for ourselves makes us like those monkeys in the famous experiment with the ladder and the bunch of bananas. Those monkeys? Yes, from that experiment that may never have been carried out and is therefore in itself a sandwich monkey story. It couldn't be more pictorial when it comes to blind copying.

A troop of monkeys sat together, with a ladder in the middle of the room leading to a delicious bunch of bananas. But when a monkey had made up its mind to grab the bananas, the entire troop of monkeys was sprayed with cold water by the experiment's leaders. Soon the monkeys established a link between going up the ladder and the cold water. Each subsequent monkey that dared to climb up the ladder was pulled off by the rest and spanked. As a result, the ladder and the bananas were left alone. The experiment leaders exchanged one of the monkeys from the troop for a new monkey, who eagerly wanted to climb up the ladder and was immediately yanked off by the other monkeys. Without clearly knowing why, it was clear

that he should not try that again. All the monkeys in the troop were replaced one by one until a completely new troop was present. The rule that the ladder was off-limits remained, but none of the monkeys remembered why. No one had seen or felt the spraying with cold water themselves.

That is the current situation most companies are in. All that is left is to say: this is how it works here.

But what if the world changes? What if that garden hose or the mean experiment leaders go away? The new troop of monkeys no longer make the link to the garden hose, the cold water or the experiment leaders. They only know that the ladder is forbidden. So even if they literally see the experiment leaders leave, no light goes on that the bananas are now accessible with impunity. That opportunity is not noticed and the rule of the forbidden ladder remains in place because "that's how it works here."

As far as we are concerned, those management methods and forms of work have only one purpose. To be an inspiration. Nothing more.

As a company, you can *cherry pick*, choose what suits you and then create your own form. With the big caveat that in doing so, above all, keep thinking for yourself and consult with your people about what best suits them, the work, the industry and the world you're in. Adopting methods and thinking you can quickly implement them as a ready-made warm-up meal is backward.

That is precisely the danger of such methods as the Spotify model, Holacracy and Sociocracy 3.0. The fact that they have a name makes them perceived as a package and adopted thoughtlessly. It's not *click-and-play*. You can't cut and paste and think Kees is done.

It's time to think for yourself. Making a change in your organization is hard work. From the management literature, grab ideas and methodologies that appeal to you, experiment with them briefly, and figure out what's

wrong with them so you can adapt the methodology to your own organization. Explain what you want to do, rather than referring to the name of the methodology.

For example, we're just telling you that you should experiment with it short-cycle, and not saying, "use Scrum to apply management ideas in your organization. That's confusing. It leads to clinging to outdated and non-usable processes, when you should be as agile as possible. Cherry pick, try, fall flat on your face, adjust and try again. Create your own management methodology and keep it nice and to yourself.

2. Why Meeting ToTaal is Insane.

Meetings. We sigh just thinking about them. They are time-consuming, inefficient and energy-guzzling. Sixty-seven percent of respondents in a survey of nearly two thousand employees¹ said meetings keep them from making an impact at work. That's not good.

A meeting is a gathering of more than two people to discuss some topic, preferably with a purpose. In the *Van Dale*, meeting is simply "to gather together. There, the idea of a purpose is not even mentioned. And while we have no objection to getting together or jointly discussing something in order to reach an outcome, we do dislike meetings as they are in most cases: many, aimless, slow, and with the naïve idea that some form of connection and transparency is given to them. While the latter is not the case. The same survey asked how people do feel they are making an impact: when they have one-on-one conversations with colleagues. Connection is a theme you will see more of in this book.

NRC EDITOR and columnist Japke-d. Bouma describes meetings as "a way of managers to show that they are busy and doing seemingly useful work. A sham of busyness to justify their own existence.' People who really have something to do don't hold meetings. In one of her columns, she plastered about two A4s full of all the terms people give to meetings these days. From Campfire Sessions to Deep-Dives to the Good Talk and Feet-on-Table meetings. All boil down to the same thing, in a slightly different form or with a slightly different structure. But it's all a lot of fuss for a simple moment of discussion. And if connection is the goal of the conversation, then person-to-person conversation is most effective.

¹ <https://www.kornferry.com/about-us/press/working-or-wasting-time>

Also telling are the roles that are assigned. The chairman who must necessarily rotate, or the note taker who makes endless notes of every fart and poo that comes out of each individual's mouth, after which no one, absolutely no one, is ever going to read back the piece of text the note taker wrote. At least never in its completeness. There are fine attributes used to give everyone of turn: caps, hugs, *talking-sticks*. Even the people who have nothing to say and wonder why they are there in the first place. And then the one-on-ones (or bilas) that spontaneously arise even during large-group meetings, which are painfully awkwardly broken off with the phrase: 'now back to central'. And finally, the awkward endings of meetings after which hopefully everyone returns to his or her workplace with energy, usually with exactly the opposite, jaded and tired-eyed-colleague effect.

Many meetings are scheduled with people who have nothing to do with the information coming across the table. When you ask them if they find meetings like this useful, they all say, "Yes, because I do like being kept informed about what's going on. While in the meeting itself, you see them staring at their smartphone, having their laptop open, looking at the clock or in some cases literally falling asleep. Admitting to yourself that you are wasting your time but showing up anyway is a form of self-flagellation. So then it's better to keep the lie intact and feed yourself the idea that it's nice to be kept in the loop. 35 percent of people accept a meeting invitation while thinking in advance that it is not relevant to them. And then they go.

Meeting time has only increased over the past few decades. *Harvard Business Review* describes that over the last 50 years, executives have gone from spending an average of 10 hours a week in the 1960s, to 23 hours of meetings.² And then many of the meetings are also ineffective. We stick to dysfunctional habits, such as straying off topic, complaining, being busy with

² <https://hbr.org/2017/07/stop-the-meeting-madness>

other things (smartphone), arriving late, not being prepared, and not stating your opinion when you have one. Two thirds of all meetings end without a decision. The University of Amsterdam showed that this type of meeting practice is linked to lower market value, reduced innovation and instability among the staff of those companies.

Professor Nancy Koehn of Harvard conducted research on meetings.³ She summarized her findings as follows: there are 11 million meetings a day in the USA. That's four billion meetings a year. More than 50 percent of the people she surveyed reported that at least half of the meetings were wasted time or felt unproductive. That means that in the USA, two billion meetings a year contribute nothing. Converted, she came up with \$37 billion a year in wasted costs. If this also applies to the Netherlands (which is not very strange to think), then we waste almost two billion euros on idle meetings in our cold little country. So we find meetings annoying, unproductive, we don't make decisions in them and they cost us a whole lot. So why do we still do them like this?

In business schools, we are taught to hold "official" meetings. We break up into small groups to meet structurally, rotate the chairperson role and the note-taker role, and thus all undergo the hell called meeting. Then we end up in organizations where they apparently still use the same method, making us think: See, it's a good thing I learned how that works in school. Including all the quirks, traditions and weird customs that the organization has inadvertently developed over the years. All things that don't necessarily contribute anything.

We also studied and remember exactly how that went.

Required to prepare for the meeting when it was your turn to chair your group of unmotivated students. In passing, you find out that chairing

³ <http://blog.idonethis.com/break-the-bad-habit-of-ineffective-meetings>

basically means that you are the only one who is prepared at the time and also has an opinion on the topics being discussed. The rest have enjoyed their non-chairmanship freedom and feel justified in continuing the same in the meetings by actively yapping along. Not to mention the circular question where nothing comes out and the w.v.t.t.k.'s where students have to consult Google to find out what the abbreviation stands for. The rest of the table. Why Meeting ToTaal is Insane you mean.

Once in the big, angry human world, you hope with all your heart and soul that they do things a little differently there after all. Until you realize with a great shock that people are actually meeting in exactly the same way. We still come across companies where the chairman is still the only one who has prepared the meeting. And every time, the chairman is disappointed that the other teammates didn't contribute to come up with agenda items for the structurally scheduled meeting. After all, we do need to discuss something in those two hours. It does not occur to any of the attendees to stop earlier or cancel the meeting altogether.

Keep up this behavior for a few years and you won't know any better than that this is the way to keep each other informed of nonsense and things undecided. You start believing that this is a part of working life, until you have become someone who starts defending the meeting culture as a necessary evil in order to be an understanding, listening to each other, inclusive and learning work environment. This further perpetuates the problem.

But it doesn't have to be this way. We don't have to meet like this forever. The fact that we all find it tedious can actually be an impetus for connection. How? The most important thing is to evaluate together and adjust. Do a survey. Question. See where the bottlenecks are in meetings. Abolish some meetings that are no longer needed. Find alternatives to keep

people informed, such as Slack, Yammer, a podcast, or just go around everyone having five-minute conversations. You're probably saving more time with the latter than it's costing you.

In any case, let's stop nonsensical meetings.

3. The "professional me" and LEGO

We sometimes do sessions with employees from other companies to "think crosswise" or "think fresh. In one such session, something interesting happened. When an employee raised her voice about the organization's outlined norms and values, she literally said, "My professional self can agree with these words, but personally I don't feel comfortable with them. Privately, I wouldn't be able to reconcile with it at all.'

We cherish moments like that, because for a moment the cranium completely locks up and the substances that cause hilarity are suddenly happily swirling around in our heads. No one in the room really seemed to notice how bizarre those words actually were, so we dwelled on them explicitly. Once we had pointed out how strange the comment actually was, the penny dropped with the rest of the room as well. This could not be what the organization had in mind.

So your "professional self" does find something normal, which your actual self would not find normal. Although it seems to be mainly a problem for the people involved, in the long run it is mainly a problem for the organization. Apparently you have formulated something that does not resonate with your people. Apparently, it is common corporate culture that people conform to a group opinion, whereas you want individuals to be able to flourish within an organization according to their own needs. Apparently, people think it is normal to have a "professional self," and have forgotten how important it is to be able to feel safe enough to be yourself on a daily basis.

Studies by social psychologist Anne Wilson show that a fairly large group of people (72 percent) feel happy reasonably authentic at work. And she shows that feeling safe and being able to be yourself at work is related to your engagement. Yet for a significant group (30 percent), it takes nine months or more before they feel at home at work. So in total, nearly 60 percent of people (especially the first nine months of their job) do not feel authentic, 28 percent of whom will never feel authentic at work. If you're talking about being inclusive at work, this is a number to consider.⁴

	Not yourself in the organization	Well yourself in the organization
Well yourself to customers	Empty ego	Delight yourself
Not yourself to customers	LEGO DOLL	Plastic brain, human heart

Actually, the people who bring their "professional self" to work are saying: I don't feel at home here, or: at least I don't feel free enough to be myself. That can mean two things: your organization is not inclusive for everyone, even though you would like it to be. Or, on the contrary, you are deliberately exclusive and you employ some individuals who are accidentally out of place. Whatever you want, it's good to check where you stand. And it won't surprise you which is our preference. We advocate the most inclusive culture possible where there is room for every ego to flourish.

The "professional me. That's hugely schizophrenic. It means having people working for you who play a role. Who put on an imaginary cap and,

⁴ <https://hbr.org/2016/05/most-employees-feel-authentic-at-work-but-it-can-take-a-while>

upon returning home, put that cap back on. If we ask ourselves what makes people yearn for retirement, or where the high rate of burnout comes from, you can bet that it has a lot to do with the fact that people have to do something that goes against their own values or 'being'. That there is not enough room for the individual to bring themselves to the business, including their challenges and character. Now if a manager were to ask colleagues to temporarily play the role of "police" or "rascal," just like you used to do with LEGO, we would find that very strange. Yet the same thing happens, but with different roles. We therefore call the people who are victims of this "lego DOLLS," someone who has been turned into an employee by the corporate playing of the role, who exhibits exactly the behavior the employer wants to see. Uniform and all with the same yellow face. Even the facial expression is determined by the boss.

Unfortunately, the creature then no longer shows his or her true nature. We invariably advise those people to ritually burn the "professional self. If you don't bring your full self to work, you will be judged on that from now on. Then, if you actually turn out not to fit in with the organization, you better know it. The sooner, the better, go do something else. Free yourself.

If you work at an organization where LEGO BEHAVIOR does become expected of you, then that is an organization that very likely has less of a future than they would like to acknowledge. Sooner or later people will walk away, demotivation in the organization will be on the rise, and customers will pierce through the facade of played behavior. Authenticity is valued because business in any form assumes personal relationships and intercourse. Human relationships make the real difference. Individuals who are not afraid to show their true character mean more to your business than followers who exhibit socially desirable behavior. The latter are regularly bland versions of themselves.

Fortunately, as human beings, we have feelers for authentic behavior. Not always immediately, but eventually someone's true nature always surfaces. How many of your real friends are fake to you? That's also how your customers are going to love sincere people the most. Because let's face it: who are you more likely to believe? The one who is himself or the one who plays a role?

We would also like to remind you that companies do not cooperate with each other. It is people who do. Companies are actually "nothing. You can become a brand as a company that evokes a certain positive atmosphere with customers, but the really essential collaborations of and between most organizations, are built and maintained by people. A PLC may be a natural legal entity, but it cannot talk. It is the people from different companies who may or may not click with each other, and if they do, there is a greater chance of success for a lasting partnership.

To build a good relationship, it is better to assume people who sincerely cooperate with each other. Should you have created LEGO DOLLS, you may assume that there will be less dynamic cooperation than between people who can show their full "I". Should you feel like a lego DOLL, CHANCES ARE YOU WILL wonder why it is that customers don't stick with you for long and why you have few friendly colleagues. You are probably much more sincere privately than at work. And if that's the other way around, you may wonder what you're doing wrong privately.

Please let it be that there is no difference between one and the other. Find an organization that suits you to such an extent that before and after your travel time you don't have to blow out because you played a role at work. Only actors play for a living. That is a profession.

If you lead an organizational culture where people feel they have to be the professional, you run the risk of anecdotes like the following. A man

applies for a job at a large company. It is a distinguished position, for which a selection committee of three employees from the department, plus someone from hr, considers the candidates. Upon entering the office, to his horror, the candidate sees his ex-girlfriend walking toward him. Perplexed, he looks at her, but before he can say anything she holds out her hand and says, "Good afternoon, I'm Annelien, come in. Uncomfortable, he says something back and sits down. An hour and a half later, he walks out of the room wondering what just happened. You guessed it: he didn't say anything, she didn't say anything. At least, not to anyone else present. *They both played the game.*

Two rounds of applications later, he was hired. With a telling wink from his ex-girlfriend attached. She helped him a little. Please tell us, how on earth are they going to keep up this façade together for the next few years? Just keep pretending they never met before? Well, there doesn't seem to be anything else to do. From now on, they are colleagues and literally keep it "professional.

To all the organizations of the Netherlands that play company: *you get what you deserve.* Colleagues put aside their own identity so that they can be comfortable with what is asked of them. But do they give themselves completely, or do they play a shadow of themselves? Are they competing for the "real thing" or playing along for the "fake thing"? It is as schizophrenic as the Zoom and Teams calls where some organizations still require their employees to put on a blouse and jacket at home because that is the norm. At the top, they may be neatly dressed, but underneath, most people are with their sweatpants on, or naked if they wish. The employer doesn't care, as long as it's right on the surface.

Who or what do you really want to be as an organization? You end up being taken as seriously as you take your colleagues seriously.

4. One rule to rule them all

In stores and cafes there are house rules that no one reads. That you are not allowed to steal we all know. That you are not allowed to bring food inside also has to do with norms and values. If it does happen, then someone is called to account by an employee or another customer. It is not that the undesirable behavior is prevented by the house rules posted on the window or door.

Even in offices, there are bills on what is desirable and undesirable behavior. While you can trust that just about all people do what you expect them to do. And don't do what they shouldn't. Those few people who don't give a shit don't listen to house rules either. So why make them? Nobody knows them and often they are full of nonsense or customer unfriendly things. Or they are belittling towards your staff. Those A4s in the kitchen or by the toilets: 'Don't forget to flush.' Or even worse, on the toilet door when you leave it: 'Look back again and grab the brush if you need to.' Whew.

The most trivial matters are laid down in house rules or a personnel manual under the slogan "This is how it works here. Instructions for requesting vacation days, taking leave and calling in sick may seem to be among the logical variants, but let's face it: that too is nonsense. After all, colleagues can also talk to each other and coordinate things among themselves like adults.

With all these instructions and laying down (subject to change) rules, organizations spend an excessive amount of time, which does not benefit the ultimate core. Such procedural matters can never be prioritized unless they are precisely part of the primary process. And that is the crux of this story:

of course such procedures are relevant to a nuclear power plant, a hospital and a prison. Places where safety must flourish because otherwise deaths may occur. But where no human lives are at stake, it is totally foolish to employ special procedure experts to take care of this.

We all seem to have gone crazy. And we don't mind that - *we like a little craziness* - but that as a collective we don't seem to realize it: that hurts. We are an intelligent country, aren't we? Perhaps we have gone overboard with pedantry and control?

When you are belittling your staff and customers, you are not actually taking them seriously. And therein lies a great danger for organizations. If you expect people to conform to certain rules of behavior, they slowly do. As a result, they slip into a smoothed-out, yet sometimes "professional" version of themselves. If you require people to exhibit socially desirable behavior, you can bet that they will also exhibit socially desirable behavior in ways you don't want. Feigning productivity, for example.

If someone is having a bizarre offday after a long weekend slog, they may be able to write for hours on various clients, but whether anything good really came out of it is questionable. By contrast, if you create a culture where someone doesn't have to hide his or her true nature, then you can expect someone to honestly say "didn't perform a plague today. Not what you want to hear perhaps, but so honest. You can then help someone put in extra motivated useful hours for the client the following day. And preferably even extra, of their own volition.

Better than any other rules in an organization, you might choose the following maxim or guideline (by which we mean that you should especially not chalk it on the wall):

'Do what you can't, leave what you can't make.'

In doing so, you subsume everything. The sub-sentence appeals to the morality of one's colleagues; the first part of the sentence challenges everyone to live entirely according to the ego's wishes. Unless you can't make that happen. Self-regulation. Which, by the way, only works if the context is right. After all, behavior is largely determined by context. In any case, you appeal to risk-taking, within a framework of morally responsible behavior.

No more rules about vacations, because you can't afford to stay away for three months in a row without consulting your colleagues. That A4 sheet by the kitchen is no longer necessary, because you can't saddle Christian with your dirty dishes again, so you put them in the dishwasher. But if you want to buy a gift for a client once, to show how much they mean to you and the organization and to strengthen the connection, you don't need permission to expand your budgets. No, then you can just do it. A dinner or a flower will do just fine. An all-expense paid trip to Dubai, where you get to tag along to "keep an eye on the trip," then again, you can't do that.

This maxim will live and work only if the leaders within the organization lead by example and clearly communicate the maxim with some repetition. Can there really be no other rule then?

There is no need to exaggerate. A surgeon walking past protocols or safety being monitored at transformers with quite a bit of high voltage running through them, there may well be some rules for that. But even here, "do what you can't, and leave what you can't make" can be a component. In an area with high voltage, you can't afford not to draw people's attention to the dangers. And doing so with signs alone may not be enough.

But in most organizations, *safety* and *security managers* are not needed and fatal accidents do not occur while staring at a screen. Somewhere the rules were created to create a sense of security. 'If we have this, it's taken

care of.' Or, 'If we have this, then we have something to rely on.' Actually, that's a vote of no confidence toward your employees and customers. Which in itself is a very bad thing; the more the merrier trusts his guests, after all. And giving distrust actually creates a sense of insecurity.

In short, the more rules you set up, the more will be violated. Moreover, it is just too easy thinking. Just covering the problem with rules is not daring to look at the underlying cause and tackle it. You don't get rid of a dragon by hanging a sign around its neck saying: 'DRAGONS DON'T EXIST'.

We advocate taking a critical look at rules and protocols, scrapping a whole bunch of them, and if you need something anyway, putting the aforementioned maxim in its place. Long live anarchy. Long live the *one rule to rule them all*: do as you please. Then all will be well.