

# Homo Conexus

*A new concept of being*

By Margôt van Brakel

*For you, because I care for you. Je suis donc tu es.  
And I want you to know that you can make a difference!*

*For Gaia. Because Earth is our home.*

*I am me*

*I am you*

*But are you me?*

*And who are we?*

*One is all, and all is one*

*Without seeing we are none*

*Are we blind or dare we see*

*From me, to we, to totality?*

## Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Guiding you through the book</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Your starting point</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Part 1: Why the world needs Homo Conexus</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>The challenges of our time and the opportunities that come with it</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Why should I care</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>The faults of our system</b> .....	<b>16</b>
Personal perspective .....	16
A little bit of Maslow .....	17
Business perspective .....	17
Societal perspective .....	19
<b>A new way of seeing</b> .....	<b>22</b>
Life is a looking box .....	23
Seeing ourselves as Homo Conexus .....	23
A crisis is a message .....	24
The foundational question .....	24
<b>More connected than ever?</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Same conclusion, different words</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>Part 2: The Conexus Model</b> .....	<b>29</b>
The model in brief .....	29
<b>Understanding Identity</b> .....	<b>32</b>
Finding out who you are.....	32
There is nothing wrong with self-love .....	42
Individualism versus individuality .....	42
Wrapping it up for Identity.....	42
Identity from an organizational perspective .....	43
<b>Dare to be authentic</b> .....	<b>45</b>
The paradox of vulnerability .....	46
Authenticity from an organizational perspective.....	48
<b>The power of Intimacy</b> .....	<b>50</b>
I see you, and you see me .....	50
Ubuntu – I am because you are.....	52
Intimacy from an organizational perspective.....	55
<b>With Inclusiveness we move towards wholeness</b> .....	<b>59</b>
Can you see it? .....	62
Inclusiveness from an organizational perspective .....	63
ESG doesn't make people act differently .....	65
<b>Guidance for the model</b> .....	<b>67</b>
Being part of a network.....	67
The power of giving .....	67
Deepening your connection .....	68

Three golden questions.....	68
Don't underestimate the power of you.....	69
<b>Part 3: Coming full circle.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>The impact on an individual level .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>The impact for organizations .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>The impact on society.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Afterword.....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Recommended resources.....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Downloads and links .....</b>	<b>81</b>

## Preface

When I was 14 years old, I wanted to become a doctor, healing people. When I was 16, I wanted to become an actress, enchanting people. I was creative. I painted, wrote poems, played music. But when it was time to go to university, my dreams had turned to dust. Instead, I chose a solid path to become successful in business. What I could do for others had somehow become less important.

So, I got the education, did the work, became a manager. There's no kid on earth that dreams of becoming a manager. But I was no longer a kid. Fantasy time was over. Facing the grown-up reality was the mantra now. With grown up ideals and grown-up ambitions. Although being a manager was a big mistake – I hated it – I continued this course. I started my own business, consulting for corporates. Being good at what I do and with happy clients to prove it. Playing along with the game of our time. The rat race for performance: perform – get better – repeat.

Until one day ... I realized I was living other people's dreams.

Until one day ... I started questioning the choices I had made.

Until one day ... I wondered what it means to be me.

Until one day ... I allowed myself to dream again.

I am a person who wants to make sense of things. My personal journey led to a simple truth. A truth that has helped me to get back to being me. And in discovering that truth I somehow returned to my childhood track. Back to healing, enchanting and creativity. And the amazing thing is that by being true to me - at the same time - I am more valuable to others.

A few years ago, I started sharing my story and my truth as a speaker. All my experience, from my childhood, throughout my corporate life, to today, has brought me where I am now. A truckload of experience and expertise that boiled down to a simple and powerful truth that will help you get back on track, living the dreams you may have let go of. In my first book I shared my personal journey – an exploration – leading to the concept of Homo Conexus. Now – with this book – I want to focus on the concept itself, and the relevance for you. A foundational book, for everyone. As a speaker, I can't be on every stage, but with this book, I can be on every bookshelf, in every home, in every life. Because I know this book will make

a difference. For you and for humanity as a whole. The concept of Homo Conexus is my cure to save the world. Big words, I know. But in the back of my mind, I hear a soft voice whispering: “It ain’t big enough if it doesn’t scare the hell out of you.” So yes. Here it is. Big and Bold. Because I know it's true. Simple and true, you’ll see.

## Introduction

*Homo Conexus, a new concept of being* provides a simple truth to unlock the full potential of humankind. It's a pathway to get back on the right track for all of us who are caught in the rat race of life. For all of us who feel that somehow, we're stuck in a time where things are not how they should be or could be. For all of us who want to find a way to fix what's broken. For all of you, this book offers a simple truth. Easy to read, easy to understand and – most importantly – easy to apply. Because I believe it's not the information I am about to share that makes the difference. It's the action that will follow. Whether you are a young professional at the start of your career, or the CEO responsible for a multinational with thousands of employees all around the world. This book – and the truth it holds – is for you.

What if you could put on a pair of glasses and see the world in a completely different light? This book is about to give you this pair of glasses. And once you see yourself and the world in this light, you can't not see things this way. This book is a personal mind shifter. But more importantly, this book promises to share a new perspective that will help tackle the big challenges of our time. A positive perspective on humanity, as guidance for the choices we need to make to realize breakthroughs in the areas where our system got stuck. Introducing you to a concept that is extremely simple, and therefore very powerful. As the foundation for a collective mind shift.

So how did this come about? Somehow life needs to happen before you can make sense of it. Although I believe age doesn't necessarily match wisdom, aging does help. At some point in my life, I really felt the need to understand life. What is it about? What am I here to do? What's the purpose of all things? The existential questions, you may recognize.

In the summer of 2018, a few things happened that accelerated this process. The coinciding of life and death. First, I heard tech-philosopher Alix Rübsaam <sup>1</sup>talk about "AI or Die". Diving into artificial intelligence and how we view ourselves. She planted a seed in my mind with her statement that throughout history we as humans seem to compare ourselves to the leading technology of our time. So, for us that is a (pretty smart) computer or a robot. 'But we aren't a computer, are we?', she added. This may feel surrealistic, but it made me revisit

---

<sup>1</sup> Alix Rübsaam is Ph.D. candidate at the Humanities faculty of the University of Amsterdam and Head of Expertise and Curriculum at the Singularity University.



how I see myself. And then reflecting if my actions and my decisions matched this belief. It may be interesting for you to do this exercise – but we'll get back to that later in this book. Let me first add the second event that made all the difference.

A few weeks later my mum passed away. It was ok. Her life had come to an end. We all knew this moment was about to happen, and when it did it was actually beautiful. To be with her in her last days. Together looking back at all her years – with gratitude – and then sitting with her at the moment when life's energy slowly left her physical body for good. Nietzsche says you live your life 'to become who you are'. And my mum had done a good job at that. She had become who she was.

So, thinking of life, with the computer/human comparison that RübSaam gave me together with the experience of my mum passing away, set things in motion, bringing life's big questions into my work. One thing I had learned over the years is that life and work are connected. Although we keep talking about the work-life balance, it's really the work/life connection that needs to make sense. Doing work, that matches what your life should be about.

For over 20 years I have been helping organizations with the human side of transformation. To engage people in change. Most times change is about efficiency. Doing more with less. To put it bluntly, it's doing more work with fewer people. But what if this strive is not the right one? What if we are moving in the wrong direction? All this focus on efficiency hasn't helped us to fix the big problems in our society. Climate change, inequality, poverty, unemployment.

The summer of 2018 marked the beginning of a personal journey to find answers to essential questions. To understand myself, my role in this life, and how the world works. No small quest, but an important one.

In this book, I am sharing the result of this quest. Introducing the Homo Conexus, a new concept of being. Wayne Dyer <sup>2</sup>said: 'If you change the way you look at things, the things

---

<sup>2</sup> Wayne W. Dyer (1940 – 2015) was an internationally renowned author and speaker in the fields of self-development and spiritual growth.

you look at change'. And he is quite right. This concept will make you look at yourself and other human beings differently. In a way that will help us realize breakthroughs in the tough challenges of our time.

In the past years, I have further developed and tested this concept. I have challenged myself to prove it wrong, but again and again, I have been reconfirmed in the truthness of it. Its simplicity is its strength. And with most things in life that are simple, they are true. The concept of Homo Conexus is a rock solid and universal truth. It ties into many other visions that are already out there, but the difference is that the Homo Conexus concept comes with a model to put things to practice. To start moving in the right direction by knowing where to start and what to focus on. Another difference is the aim. Yes, we can change; one person at a time. And it's our responsibility to focus on our personal change – or rather our personal transformation. Making the shift on an individual level. But where we really make a difference, and what the objective of the Homo Conexus concept is, is to make a collective shift. As humanity. It's about time we did.

You see, I believe that the rat race for performance has gone too far. We are selling ourselves short, as individuals, as organizations, as society. Because we seem to have forgotten what it means to be human. This book is here to bring back the natural essence into our lives and into our world. To return to the way we were meant to be. That is our way forward, out of this mess. From an unimaginative, uninspiring life, towards a life worth living. Making a difference. For you, for me, for all of us. And for our planet. Because planet Earth is our home.

I truly hope this book empowers you and gives you hope and courage to move forward in your life. Seeing things differently with a new pair of glasses it offers. Although in our time we are facing many challenges, I believe that what we need is a positive and hopeful view on our future as humanity. We can look back and learn from our past, but what matters most is how we move forward. With a positive and collective intention. Don't underestimate the power of intention. Just imagine what could happen if we – as humanity – would focus our collective intention towards a better future. To be forever connected, with ourselves, with others and with all there is. As Homo Conexus. It's time.

## Guiding you through the book

This book is easy to read, and it shouldn't take you too long to get through it. I have written it, as if I am talking to you. So, I hope you can hear my voice as your eyes follow the words on the pages. Here and there you will find exercises to help you experience what I am trying to explain. I'll start by looking at our reality of today. To understand the context we are in and why our current beliefs are holding us back. Then I will introduce the concept of Homo Conexus. As promised, it's simple. But the magic happens when you put it to practice. This is where the *Conexus Model* comes in. To help you take action.

The Conexus Model has four different elements, which I will go through one by one. Generously adding examples to make my point. As the concept works both on an individual level as on an organizational level, I will address both perspectives separately. I advise you to read one element per day and give yourself time for it to sink in, before moving on.

And then it's a wrap. Tying things together to make you see how this new way of seeing will make a difference for our world of tomorrow.

I always ask my audience how they look at things now. Are we in a time of crisis or are we in a time of transformation? Seeing crisis as a phase where we focus managing things back to what it was before. To take control and get a grip. As opposed to transformation, where we open up for something new? Are we ready for this? My gut feeling is telling me that we are. That we are moving towards transformation. It's good to realize that this doesn't come without effort. Just think of a butterfly. Before it can show its wings, it has to go through a tough and ugly phase. And there is no way of speeding up the process. A transformation happens one person at a time, at everyone's own pace. And then, when you are ready, you enter a new phase. A new reality with wings to fly – in a manner of speaking. I truly hope – and trust - you will feel that way.

So that's the book. From conceptual ideal to spreading your wings, ready to fly.

## Your starting point

Now before you read on, allow yourself to ponder on a question. What if your life was a clean slate? What if you could design it from scratch? What if anything was possible? What would that look like? What would you be like?

In Zen Buddhism they have a beautiful concept called *shoshin*, beginner's mind. It's the *art of not knowing*. We tend to value knowledge. But the more we know, the more we realize we don't know. So, what if we just accept that we don't know. Leave all our knowledge aside, and then see what happens?

I invite you to take on a beginner's mind. To look at things with fresh eyes. It's a great way to open up to new ways of thinking. To let go of beliefs that no longer serve us and make way for something that was not there before. And with this beginner's mind just let your mind run free with the questions at the top of this page.

Now don't go fantasizing about winning the lottery, living in a huge mansion, having all the money in the world. This exercise has nothing to do with material wealth. I would like you to fantasize what kind of person you would be. What makes you happy? How would you spend your time? How would you relate to others? What would our society look like? Our planet? Just dare to dream. It's always good to have a starting point. Remember this when you read on.

This book is my gift to you, and to the world. A simple truth that has the power to heal what's broken. It's within our reach if only we can learn to see it. So, hold on to that dream – with your beginner's mind - and enjoy how a new way of looking at yourself and your world is about to unfold. Welcome to the world as Homo Conexus.

## Part 1: Why the world needs Homo Conexus

### The challenges of our time and the opportunities that come with it

I won't bother you with history too much here. There is plenty history reading available if you want to dive deeper. So just the basics. It's obvious that we have come a long way since being hunters and farmers. From Fred Flintstone to Alexa. While over centuries our lives have become smarter and savvier, due to the sequential industrial revolutions (from steam power to mass production, automation, and hyper connectivity), this progress goes hand in hand with global challenges. The 17 UN sustainable development goals <sup>3</sup>(SDG's) show the vastness of these challenges. The goals set the agenda for what we aim to achieve in 2030. But although the SDG's have become part of our everyday vocabulary, and every country and every organization is eager to state a strong commitment towards them, we are far from reaching what we set ourselves to do. The good thing is that we have these goals, but realizing a breakthrough in any one of them, will not happen with only commitment within our current way of acting.

What is required asks us to go beyond that. Because doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results, just doesn't make sense. Einstein called it insanity. You can call it what you want. To me it's obvious that we need *system change*. And here the real problem surfaces because our system gives us structure and provides us with certainty. It's something we can hold on to. 'The system always wins'. Yes, it's true, until we start realizing that the system is preventing us from making real progress. You see, the simple truth is that our system - in every area, whether it's education, taxes, or healthcare, to name just a few – is standing in the way of what we need. The power of economics and individualism has reached its limits, and now it's time to face the fact that our system is no longer serving us.

I don't believe in building a new system next to an existing system. There are plenty of examples of communities that have tried to build utopian places, excluded from the current system. They all fail because in the end everything is connected. That is a universal law, which these communities overlooked. The way to change the system is from within. And that

---

<sup>3</sup> The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Global Goals are a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a "shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future". The SDGs were set up in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly (UN-GA) and are intended to be achieved by 2030.

starts with you. Instead of changing your context – expecting change to come from outside you – all you have to do is change how you look at the world. At yourself, as a being in this world. This little poem from Rumi, the 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian poet, says it all:

*“Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world.  
Today, I am wise, so I am changing myself.”*

## Why should I care

I realize that *system change* is a very conceptual idea. It's no surprise if you don't relate to it. Let me help you to see what this means to you personally and why you should care. What if you see yourself as a system? You are a person. You have a way of doing things, a way of making choices. Now that is a system in action.

Maybe you would rather like to look at this from a business perspective, instead of a personal perspective. Then your business – your organization is this system.

Whether you look at it from an individual perspective, an organizational perspective, or a societal perspective. It all comes down to the same thing. The way we operate (forgive my 'computer' language), is no longer serving us. There is so much potential that we fail to tap into because our system is cutting us off from going there. It has no value in our current way of thinking. The good news is that it doesn't have to be that way. Remember I told you about putting on a new pair of glasses. We are about to put them on, but before we do, I need to dig deeper into the faults of our system, because this is what will drive our change.

## The faults of our system

Again, here I will look at it from different levels. First personal, then organizational, then societal. From me, to we, to totality.

### Personal perspective

On a personal level there is a funny thing going on. On the one hand we have individualism. Focusing on our own wellbeing – or rather *welldoing*. I know this is not a proper word, but it makes the point. We are focused on doing well. That goes hand in hand with comparing ourselves to others. Doing better than the other. Or at least that's our strive. Welldoing also entails having the right stuff. A good job, a nice home, a family to be proud of, a shiny watch, fancy holidays. Now that is what success looks like, right? The sad thing is that it has nothing to do with *wellbeing*.

On the other hand, we have altruism. The belief that it's important to care for others, more than for our ourselves. Western religion has had a big role in this. Mainly women are caught up – or pushed - in this line of thinking. They take care of their kids, their husband, their community, but forget to take care of themselves. That's how they were raised. In our modern time fortunately, this is shifting a bit, but people my age (I'm over fifty) will probably recognize it. Of course, it's good to take care of others, but not while neglecting yourself in doing so. Taking care of yourself – first! – is an essential step we leave out.

Individualism or altruism. They are like opposite ends of the spectrum. Neither one helps us to get further. Individualism feeds the ego; altruism neglects the self.

### Exercise

*Here I would like to challenge you with a little exercise. At the beginning of this book, I told you that we seem to compare ourselves with the leading technology of our time. So, for us that is a computer or a robot. Now let's do a little thought experiment. How do you rate yourself on a scale from 1 to 10 if you would see yourself as a robot? To help you I'll give you a definition: a robot is focused on performing, striving for perfection, aiming to improve. The key elements are performance, perfection, and continuous improvement.*



When I did this exercise myself, I had to admit that I had become pretty good at being a robot. But we are not robots, are we? And we are not meant to be robots. For now, this may seem a comfortable and successful way of operating, but on the long run – with the advancement of artificial intelligence – this aim stands in the way of unlocking our potential. Robots and computers will exceed our abilities on all three levels: performance, perfection and continuous improvement. We – as humans - have a distinctive power that makes us stand out. It's up to us to open the door to make way for this potential. Understanding that we are not meant to act as a computer is a first step.

#### A little bit of Maslow

This is a good moment to talk about Maslow. We all know the pyramid of human needs introduced by Abraham Maslow in 1943 in his book "A Theory of Human Motivation". The pyramid – as we know it – has five levels. With self-actualization as highest level. This fits our idea of individualism we see in our society today. Ruthless focus on our ego. Doing better than the rest. Putting our needs as an individual above the interests of the community. More 'me', less 'we'. Our Western culture is a very individualistic culture, and we pass it on to our kids. But we are missing the essence here. That we are not alone in the world. We are social creatures. So how can self-actualization be the highest level?

Not commonly known is that the pyramid of Maslow doesn't end with the fifth level. Maslow added a sixth level later in his life. This level is called *self-transcendence*. He wrote the following about it: "Transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos". This was published in 1971, after his death. This sixth level has never been generally recognized. I guess it doesn't fit in our 'rational' way of thinking; it doesn't work in our current system.

#### Business perspective

Now on to the business perspective and the faults in the system that we see here. Let me cut this short because there is an example that says it all. A while ago I joined a sounding board of a large international company, with employees from all around the world. At the end of this session the employees were asked to share how they felt about working for this company.

The one of the participants said: “We sacrifice people for the sake of performance”. It wasn’t just the words he used, but also the way he said it, that struck me. It was a matter of fact. There was nothing he could do about it. And then others joined in and shared examples. For instance, about the introduction of new standard procedures. Some smart consultant had calculated that it would be very cost efficient to do things in the same way all around the world. Without considering that things might not work the same way, and that customers may have different needs in different places. ‘It doesn’t work for my customers’, someone said. Because he had to follow these procedures, he secretly took on extra tasks to fix it for his customers. He was allowed to put in less time, but it cost him more...

This example says it all. And sadly, it’s not an exception. This is the way the corporate world works. Continuously trying to find new ways to be more cost efficient, to make the organization run like a Swiss watch. Applying employees as human resources. Another symbolic signal of a faulty system: seeing employees as nothing more than *resources*. How different it would be if we were to see employees as individuals bringing in amazing potential. And empowering every one of them to unlock that potential, instead of the current mechanical way of applying human labor. In the area of work we will see the uptake of computers and robots in the years to come. They are excellent performance machines. The logical consequence is that the human attribute in organizations moves towards a synergistic relationship with computers and robots. But we have a tough hurdle to take here, because our current system will never allow for the amazing potential and diversity to surface if we continue to see people as mere resources.

We already see the downside of the system. Burnout rates are increasing. Different surveys<sup>4</sup> show similar results. Around two-thirds of full-time employees say they have experienced burnout at some point in their careers. Over 50% of employees are currently feeling burned

---

<sup>4</sup> American Psychological Association (APA)’s 2021 Work and Well-being Survey; Indeed Employee Burnout Report; McKinsey Health Institute Mental Health and Wellbeing survey 2022; Deloitte Workplace Burnout Survey

out. For younger people it's even worse. In a recent survey<sup>5</sup> 84% of millennials say they have experienced burnout in their current job.

Also turnover of staff is high, and it's becoming harder to get new people in, adding to the existing pressure on the employees within the organization. This challenge in the workplace even has its own name: 'The Great Resignation'<sup>6</sup>. A recent work trend survey<sup>7</sup> shows turnover numbers going up in the past years, 43% of employees say they are likely to consider changing employers in the current year. Again here, for younger employees numbers are higher: 52% of Gen Z and millennial employees say they are likely to leave in the next year.

I recently heard someone say: 'The war of talent is over, and talent has won'. Young professionals are choosing not to work within the system, because it doesn't match their beliefs.

It seems like our house is on fire, but we fail to see it.

#### Societal perspective

Talking about a house on fire. Words by Greta Thunberg. It's time for our last perspective. Looking at things on a societal level. Maybe even on a planetary level. The biggest issue we are facing is climate change. It's becoming more urgent by the day, but we still dare to turn the other cheek. Some even continue to question if it's true.

Jane Goodall, in the beautiful book she wrote together with Douglas Abrams 'The book of hope'<sup>8</sup>, she says "We only have a small window of opportunity — a window that is closing all the time." So yes, there is hope, but we don't have much time. And hope is nothing without action. Our system needs to stimulate sustainable action. Instead, we seem to be stuck in a continuous debate. We point fingers instead of looking at ourselves to see what we

---

<sup>5</sup> Deloitte Workplace Burnout Survey

<sup>6</sup> The term Great Resignation was coined by Anthony Klotz, professor of business administration at Texas A&M University in March 2021. It's also known as the Big Quit and the Great Reshuffle, referring to the ongoing economic trend which started early 2021 of employees voluntarily resigning from their jobs.

<sup>7</sup> 2022 Work Trend Index survey by Microsoft Corp. (MSFT)

<sup>8</sup> The Book of Hope: A Survival Guide for Trying Times, October 19, 2021 by Jane Goodall, Douglas Abrams and Gail Hudson.

can do – and start doing it. The question I keep getting back to is ‘How come we *know* there is a problem, but don’t *feel* the urgency and start *showing* the action that is required?’

Do we realize it's not the problem of the planet? This is *our* problem. Planet Earth will always be there. But our life, the life of other creatures and living organisms on Earth will be impacted – even towards extinction – if we continue our current course. Our life on Earth is comfortable now, but if we don’t change, this comfort will be taken from us. Yes, our house is on fire, but we can’t feel the flames.

Our system – driven by our economic line of thinking – values money more than life.

Just a few facts of life. How come it’s much cheaper to fly from Amsterdam to Paris, than to take the train? Why is the ecological damage not infused in the price of meat. Two examples of how the economic value does not represent the ecological value. There is a complete disconnect between both value systems.

But it’s not just climate change where we see the flaws of our system. Let’s look into healthcare. It’s focused on making people better once they are sick, instead of preventing illness in the first place. Again and again, it hurts me to see people buying cheap cans of energy drinks and a frozen pizza in the supermarket. Realizing this is their diet because this is what they can afford. How come we don’t make healthy food available and affordable for everyone? It seems an obvious thing to do. It will result in overall increasing our health and reducing the excessive healthcare costs. And yet healthcare is big business, and so our system prevents us from looking at it differently.

This also brings us to education. Because, if you don’t know about food and health, then how can you make the right choices? We value reading, writing and mathematics at school, but neglect to teach essential knowledge to live a good life.

Another problem with education is our need to rank. Higher is better. We test kids from the age of five. More and more we are moving away from numbers using seemingly friendly symbols like moon, stars, suns and rockets. But the underlying system hasn’t changed. A moon is a low score, a rocket a high score. However friendly way we choose, we are still telling our kids when they don’t do well at the tests, instead of discovering and nurturing their

talents. Can you imagine the impact on their self-esteem? And the parents? They do everything they can for their kids to do well – even putting pressure on teachers to rank their kids higher. Because higher is better.

But where have the craftsmen gone? We didn't value their crafts, their work. So now we face the fact that we have a shortage of craftsmen because it hasn't been a desired occupation. And how come a smart kid (smart in our current way of thinking) ends up at university wondering why it can't become a cook? We have been raised to believe that we should use our brains and get going with it. So, if you are smart enough to go to university, that is what you are supposed to do. But what about passion, combined with talent? Imagine the waste. Pursuing a life according to the expectations of others – the standards within our society – instead of following your dreams, tapping into your talents.

I was raised this way. To do my best. Do good at school. And good is never good enough. Aim for the highest. You may recognize this. My mum was smart, but she was not allowed to pursue the education she wanted, because she was a woman. She was supposed to become a housewife one day, so no further education was needed. My father learned how to be a carpenter. He was the second son in the family. The first son was the one who got all the chances. He went to university. There was not enough money to allow every child to get this level of education, so being second in line, was just bad luck. You can imagine how things went for my father's younger sister. It was much like my mother. Things like talent and passion were exotic concepts and had nothing to do with the daily reality of making a life for yourself, with a home and a family of your own. This historical setting shows how the previous generation feeds values into the following generation. Setting the stage for our current 'higher is better' way of thinking.

And yes, we have come a long way in our Western society since then. We have been moving up the pyramid of Maslow. Towards the 5th level. It comes hand in hand with our increased welfare. But now we are in a squeeze. Because our current way of thinking is not helping us to move from self-actualization towards transcendence. Our belief system and our value system, - mainly driven by economics – are preventing us from making the changes we need, to make way for a solid sustainable future. We are selling ourselves short, as individuals, as organizations and as society. Because it doesn't have to be that way.

The faults in our system. I have navigated through them on an individual, business, and societal level. Touching a few big domains – climate, healthcare, and education – but there are many more domains you can think of. You will probably have examples from your own life, showing the cracks of our system. These are all symptoms that show the limits of our current way of ‘running’ the world, and ourselves as players in this world. The whole promise of this book is to show you there is a different way. And that is exactly what I am about to do. So, eyes wide open, here we go.

### A new way of seeing

I think I was 11 years old. I had been wearing glasses for as long as I could remember. On that specific day I was wearing my new pair of glasses and sat behind my desk to get homework done. It was my dad’s desk, but he never used it. Dads – in those days – worked at the office, not at home. From behind the desk, I had a lovely overview of the garden. And on that day, I looked out the window and was shocked! In a good way. I could actually see the leaves on the trees. I couldn’t stop looking. I was amazed.

Fast forward to a few months ago, when I saw a video of Francis. He is a student at the Western University in the US and he is color blind. I can’t imagine what that must be like. I guess for Francis it’s normal, to see the world like he sees it. But his friends had a very special gift for him. New technology has made it possible to develop glasses for people who are color blind. To enable them to see color. Francis’ friends took him into the campus garden and gave him his present. It wasn’t yet his birthday, but it was a beautiful day in autumn, with nature showing its most beautiful colors. It was a good day for their present. Francis didn’t know what to expect. Neither did his friends, because the glasses might not work for him. He put them on. And then he cried. He looked and turned, and looked and turned, and looked again. With awe. His friends had brought balloons in different colors. “They are not the same”, was all he could say, crying.

Can you imagine, seeing the world in colors for the very first time in your life? That must be mind-blowing. It’s not that reality had changed, but what he could see. His perception of reality, just like my perception, seeing the leaves of the trees, sitting behind my desk.

A different way of seeing things, changes everything. To see what was there already, but what was left unnoticed, until now. To shine a light on what remained in the dark. This new perspective is a way towards new beliefs, towards a new truth. Seeing the world with a fresh pair of eyes. Eyes that lay the foundation for a new system. To fix what's broken by shifting our perspective.

Life is a looking box

I love the metaphor of the looking box. You must have made one when you were a kid. A shoebox, in which you build a nice scenery with a hole at one end of the box to look through.

But who said you could only have one hole in a looking box? An unspoken, but unnecessary rule. What if you changed perspectives? What if you could look at your scenery from the side? You'd see the same scenery, but this new view will show you different things.

Now imagine life in our world to be the amazing scenery in your looking box. When we look through the default hole at the front we see our life, with all the challenges that it holds. Our life as human performance machines, in the rat race of life, struggling to navigate in a faulty system.

But now I invite you to cut a new hole in the looking box. You're free to figure out from which viewpoint. It may be from the top, the side – even the bottom. Looking at life in a different way is very refreshing. It holds space for a beginner's mind. A place that offers opportunities we never saw before. It's not a new life. There is no new world. It's just the same life, just seen through different eyes. It's as simple as that.

Seeing ourselves as Homo Conexus

So here, finally I introduce the concept of Homo Conexus. Your new pair of glasses. To see the same reality, but in a completely new way. A pair of glasses that you won't want to put off.

It shows the true essence of our being. Of what it means to be human. In an increasingly digital context. Digitization and robotization are part of the scenery in the looking box but

they don't define us. Moreover, these developments feed the need for us to stand out. To see how we fit into the bigger picture as humans.

For a long time, we have regarded ourselves as intelligent beings. More intelligent than any other beings. Homo Sapiens literally means 'wise man'. But is our intelligence, our smartness, really what makes us stand out? Looking at our current time we have to acknowledge that in all our wisdom we are making something that is smarter than us. Something that can perform better than us. Something that is truly a high performing machine. Computers and robots are taking on a distinguished intelligent, high-performance role. So, what are we – as humans - here for? What is our purpose?

A crisis is a message

A crisis may serve a purpose. It may have a message that needs to be shared. So, looking at the recent Covid pandemic, what did it have to say? Because we were limited in being able to connect with the people that were dear to us, we came to feel what's really important. Our social spirit fired up. We saw a revival of family life, of small communities, taking care of our neighbors. We were stepping down from our dome – from our strive for individual wealth and wellbeing - and taking responsibility of our role in our social setting. It just happened. It was a natural course of things. Covid made us experience life in a different way. It gave us the opportunity to redesign our life and our system.

But then, we bounced back. The lessons were not strong enough to take effect – it seems.

The foundational question

Thinking of our foundational question 'What does it mean to be human?' While life is slowly slipping away, even as you are reading this, you are here for a reason. And being a robot, a high performing machine, that just doesn't fit the mark.

So yes, we have been putting our head first in everything we do. Being good at the head-to-head connection. But now it's about time to really connect. And that's hard because we have pushed that away for so many years. But there is only one way forward, so being persistent, I'm sure we'll get there. We'll learn to see the difference between a connection from head-to-head – the robot way - and a connection from human to human; from heart to heart. And



going forward, by truly connecting with an open heart, doors will be opening like never before.

This is what being human is about: It's our *ability*, but also our *need* for being connected. It's being Homo Conexus.

We are humans. We are social creatures, able of making a connection with each other. Moreover, we are born to do that. When we acknowledge the value of every individual, be inclusive, be connected - we can do amazing things... we can make magic happen ... we can own our future.

We can change our system, by changing the way we see ourselves. As Homo Conexus, connected with ourselves, with others and with all there is. This is a new way of looking at ourselves and our place in the world. We are not dominant, we are not superior, we are part of all there is. Our connection to that, is what makes us who we are. This is the simple truth.

But there is more to it, to make this truth work its magic. Bear with me... What I have given you now are the frames of your new glasses, ready to fit in the spectacle lenses.

## More connected than ever?

Some may say that due to all the technology in our lives, we are already more connected than ever. But are we really? When I am standing at a bus stop and look around me everyone is staring at their phone. In a restaurant we're not talking, but we're taking pictures, sharing it on Instagram, waiting for the likes of our online friends. We are digitally more connected than ever, but loneliness, depression and burn-out have never been as big an issue as now. We have seen the numbers. Despite being digitally connected, we have somehow lost connection with ourselves. Just look at the struggles in our business and society. We have not yet found the key to solve these issues.

Although we may have felt our essence during the pandemic, it doesn't mean we know how to get back to being connected with ourselves, with others and with all there is. Being connected seems an easy thing, but it's not just something you can switch on. It's not like Wi-Fi. There's more to it to put it to practice. That is why I have dived deeper into what being connected actually means to help you along to become truly connected, through the Conexus Model.

## Same conclusion, different words

Before we move on to the model, let's get back to Maslow for a moment. Maslow – with his 6<sup>th</sup> level of self-transcendence – was onto the same line of thinking. Perhaps 'self-transcendence' was too much of a fluffy phrase in his time; too spiritual for the performance driven Western culture. But Maslow had a good point. By putting the "I" in the center of the universe, and as highest aim, we will never reach the potential of humanity; the synergy when everything comes together, as a network. What makes humans unique is our ability to have a meaningful connection with ourselves and our surroundings – transcending ourselves.

Maslow also mentions Belonging. It's the third level. But this goes beyond that level. We may belong somewhere, but we can still feel disconnected. With the knowledge of the sixth level of Maslow in mind, being "connected" is a very down to earth way of putting things. Connected with yourself, with others and with all there is. And I would like to add that it is not just a human need, but it is also a unique quality – once we start nurturing it again. When we allow ourselves to go back to our natural essence. This 'being connected' is what we need to put into action. It's what sets us apart of the (potential) ability of a robot and what opens up possibilities to fix what's broken in our system.

A final word on Maslow that relates to the idea of hierarchy. The model of Maslow is called the hierarchy of needs. And looking at the final level – self-transcendence as he calls it – may also suggests it's the 'highest' level. Different than Maslow I believe that being connected with all there is, is not a 'final' stage. It has no hierarchical value. Rather it's an all-encompassing stage. So instead of projecting it at the top of the pyramid, I would make *being connected with all there is*, the bigger context or backbone for all the other needs.

Maslow wasn't the only one to realize the importance or connection. Wise men and women throughout history have come to the same conclusion. I may even dare to state that once you start thinking about it, the question 'What does it mean to be human' will always lead to the same answer. Although different people may use different words. Homo Conexus is my way of putting things. Giving it a name, that suggests a relationship to a different view on humankind (Homo Sapiens). The underlying vision is the same. Whether it's Albert Einstein, Carl Jung, Mother Theresa, Confucius, Martin Luther King, Michael Meade or Jane Goodall. I could go on for a while adding others to this list. They all see the undeniable truth that we

are just a mere species in this great universe, and that our existence is tied into everything around us. We are not the masters of the universe, but visitors on this stage. Guests if you may, which requires us to respect our host. And to contribute to the bigger picture, not solely the wellbeing of humanity.

## Part 2: The Conexus Model

In Part one you have learned about the importance of connection. Of our need and ability of being connected. Only through this connection can we play our part in the bigger picture. This is the foundation of the truth that we are looking for. I realize that this doesn't yet help to understand how this solves the problems we are dealing with. To grasp the impact of connection, it's important to know what connection means. It seems logical, a given, but if you ask someone to describe connection and what is required to be connected, then you'll get a blurry look and different answers from different people. Although connection is such an obvious thing, we have never fully explored what it means to be connected.

### Exercise

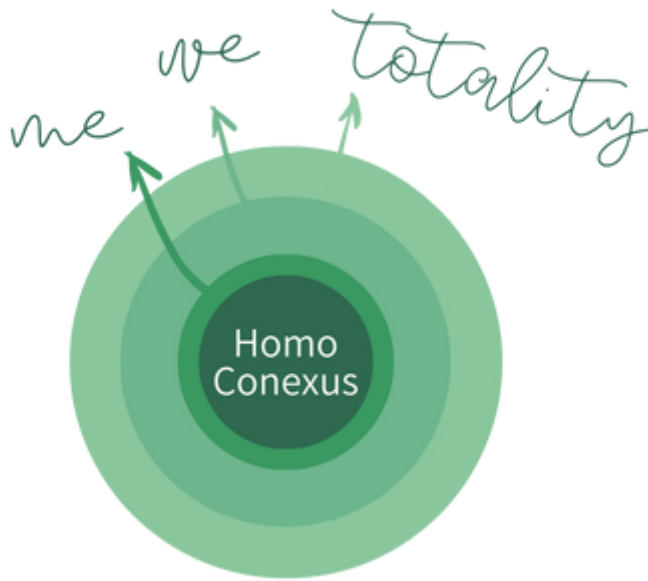
*Let's start with an exercise. Just sit for a moment. Breathe in and out, slowly but consciously. Repeat that three times. Try to steer away from distracting thoughts. And then ask yourself the following question: Are you connected? Register what happens.*

*It would be interesting to hear from people how they responded to this exercise. But in a way this is a trick question. Most of you will probably go straight to your head. Wondering what being connected is. Trying to figure out what you are supposed to feel or do to give the right answer. Don't worry. That's normal. Because we haven't given meaning to being connected. You see, we talk about connection all the time, but we fail to explain what it is.*

So, what is connection? And what does it mean – or maybe even what does it take - to be connected? That is where the Conexus Model comes in. In this chapter I will go through the model layer by layer, to help you work with the model. But let's start with an overview. And note that I am about to give you the spectacle lenses to fit in the frame of your new pair of glasses. This will start shedding some light on the impact of it.

The model in brief

Connection works in different ways. It's like a matrix, a multidimensional model. The first dimension are the connection levels. You are connected on three levels, with yourself, with others and with all there is. And in that order. First me, then we, then totality.



Then the other dimension comes in: the layers of connection. Because it's a way of deepening our connection, and every layer builds on the one before.

It starts with *Identity* - knowing who you are, feeling who you are and being ok with who you are. That is the starting point, our foundation.

The next layer is *Authenticity* - where you dare to show who you are when you are with others. To really bring yourself to the table. It sounds easy, but how many times do we put on a mask? Being connected requires you to get rid of that mask.

Then comes *Intimacy* - our third layer. Here the real magic happens. It's where you can feel the energy flowing between you and the other, because you are connected. It's the experience of "I see you, and you see me". It can only happen if you are truly open to the other.

The fourth, and final layer is *Inclusiveness* - when you realize - and feel - that you are part of a bigger whole, which goes beyond people. Claude-Lévi Strauss said it beautifully: "The individual becomes meaningful as part of the network that transcends it." If we are connected in this way, then global issues, like climate change, are no longer things that are 'outside' us, but they are part of us. And with that also comes the feeling of responsibility to do something about it, to start acting on the challenges of our time.



The Conexus Model

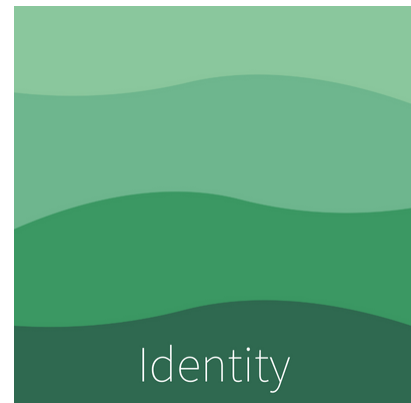
This is the full picture. So now you've got your glasses, it's time to teach you what you're seeing. In the rest of this part the four connection layers will be explained. If you get those right connecting on the three levels (me, we, totality) will automatically follow.

Just a final word before I move on. The way I explain the Conexus Model is on an individual level. However, you can use it in exactly the same way on an organizational level. I will add some examples at the end of every layer to look at it from that perspective.

## Understanding Identity

Connection starts from within by being able to connect with yourself. Without this, you wouldn't be able to connect with others. That's why you go *from me, to we, to totality*.

This makes sense, doesn't it? But as we saw with the previous exercise connecting with yourself is not as easy as it sounds. This is where the layers come in. The first layer is *Identity*. Really looking into who you are. And – equally important – to accept who you are. With all your gifts and all your flaws. Because light is nothing without dark.



Identity is the most important layer of all four. It lays the foundation and is a catalyst for the other layers. Therefore, this chapter is quite extensive, compared to the chapters about the other layers. There is a lot of depth to be found within Identity. And as you get more connected, you will experience that a deeper connection with yourself – have a deeper sense of you identity - will lead to a deeper, stronger connection on the other levels.

Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>9</sup> said that the purpose of our life is to become who we are. Notice the word 'become'. It's a verb. It implicates a journey. Others have added that the journey is therefore more important than the destination. Cynical people may say that the destination is death. You live to die. I tend to agree with this simplistic way of putting things. But ... what happens in between is what matters. The journey makes the transition from life to death worth it. Because this *land in between* comes with an ocean of depth. The layer Identity is an invitation to start exploring this depth.

### Finding out who you are

So, who are you? In our everyday life we may identify ourselves by the roles we play. A parent, a lover, a manager, a neighbor. In our life we take on many different roles. We wear different hats, but underneath these hats we should bring along our true self.

---

<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) was a German philosopher, cultural critic and philologist whose work has exerted a profound influence on modern intellectual history.



In our material world we may also identify ourselves with the things that we have. The place where we live, the car we drive, the clothes we wear. But again, they do not ‘make’ who we are, do they?

And then we have the labels. All the things we nowadays regard as part of diversity (gender, sexual preference, religion, culture, neurological condition, etc) provide us with labels. For instance, you are a female, bi-sexual, Buddhist French person with autism. Plenty of labels, but again, they do not define who we are.

Let’s strip off all you can strip off. Your job, your relationship, your labels. And then see what’s left. Who are you – what is your naked self? What truly defines you?

I know this is hard. Because we are ‘programmed’ to compare ourselves. We try to fit in. The paradox is that the more you know yourself, by *not* looking where to fit in, the more you will fit in. Because it’s the real you, instead of the molded you. We are meant to be different. To be our own unique self. However, we find ourselves on this track of trying to be ‘normal’. The secret is that being normal is a useless strive. Because normal is nothing more than a statistical truth that shows the average. And somehow, we came to believe that this statistical truth is something to strive for. Please remember this: you are not supposed to be average.

Being who you are means that your energy is flowing as it should. You are your true self. Your natural essence. So how do we find out what our nature is?

### Exercise

*This is a long exercise, so take the time and don’t skip it. If there is one exercise you should do that makes a difference, it’s this one. And make notes. Besides having something to read back, making notes also has a mental effect. It will stick with you.*

*I invite you to go back in time and review your life. Start from the earliest moment you can remember. Now, think of moments in your life, when you were doing things – experiencing things - that you really enjoyed. Be very specific about these moments and what happened. When you close your eyes, you should be able to see these moments happening again. Don’t focus on the result, but on the activity itself. Make*

*a note of these moments.*

*The next step is to write down what you did, exactly. What actions did you take? What was your role, your contribution to the result? Make notes.*

*And then the most important thing, what made you enjoy it so much? Being specific in every step is very important. Because that's how you'll find clues that will help you diverge from the 'normal' standard. For example, 'I loved to play football' is not good enough. Your moment can be related to football but should be very specific. So, for instance think of one specific moment in time, maybe a specific match. What happened there, and what made you enjoy it so much? For one person playing football may be very enjoyable because they like being part of a team, for another the joy may be about achieving the highest level. It can be completely different from person to person, but all tied into football. So be specific.*

*The final step is to use this personal history of moments to analyze yourself. What does this say about you?*

To find out who you are we are going to look at three specific things. First your talents. The exercise above gives a lot of clues to find them. Talents are things that come naturally to you. Things you just can't help doing, it's effortless. And typically – when in this flow of your talents - you are unaware of the passing of time.

In our everyday language talents are often used for very unusual special gifts, like being an amazing football player, or being able to play incredibly difficult concertos on the piano. What I mean by talent is not an exclusive gift. Because we all have talents. Not just one. And it has nothing to do with being excellent in something. Your talents are the gifts that you were born with. For instance, it could be that you can sense the mood when you enter a room. Or you are someone who can't help but spot flaws in a system. It can be your talent to help other people achieve goals, or to come up with new ideas all the time. There are many different talents and we all have at least 10 specific talents. For me it's how I always find the essence of things. That one sweet spot in the bigger picture, that says it all. Or that I always do things that make other people grow.

Analyzing your list of enjoyable moments is a good place to start to find these talents. In addition, I advise you to ask other people what they see as your special gifts. You will be amazed by what others will tell you. The thing is that our talents are so normal to us, we think everyone else acts this way too. We don't see how they stand out. So, asking other people, such as a colleague or a friend, on what they see as your special qualities can be very insightful.

There are two things you need to know about talents. One is that talents also have a downside. If you overdo it with a talent it will backfire. To give you an example, I love to find ways to make other people grow, but that is not always asked for. So, there is a time and a place to put this talent to action. And instead of focusing on others, I can always find ways to make myself grow. Or a teamplayer, who loves to serve the purpose of the team, might forget to take care of his or herself along the way. That's a talent in overdrive. Striking the balance is what is asked for.

The other thing is distinguishing between a talent and something you are good at. A talent in action gives you energy. A skill that you have developed over time and have become pretty good at can feel like a talent. It does make you stand out, but different from a talent which gives you energy, applying these skills can drain you. For example, I have become very good at managing projects. Making sure things get done. A few years ago, I was asked to manage an amazing project, launching a huge platform for 100.000 health professionals. It was an honor to work on this, but somehow it exhausted me. This experience made me realize that although I am good at project management, it's a skill I have developed over time, but not something that comes naturally to me. So, it's not a talent. Another example. I met a young woman who was very good at sensing the mood in a room. She told me that as a young child her parents were fighting a lot, and she had learnt to sense how the mood was at home, so she knew how to behave. The question is whether this is a skill she developed or a talent that was already there. The young woman is the only one who can answer that question, but it's important to know the difference.

What I call talents is based on the research and writing by Luk Dewulf<sup>10</sup>. But there are similar concepts such as ‘The Element’ (Ken Robinson<sup>11</sup>), or ‘Genius’ (Michael Meade<sup>12</sup>). Chose the concept that works for you. You will find references at the back of this book.

Now on to the second element of our identity I would like to share with you. This is to find out what gives you joy. Things that fire up your energy. These are your energizers. It may feel similar to a talent, however, there is a significant distinction. A talent is an activity that comes naturally to you, and that has value. Being able to sense the mood is a valuable gift with regards to cooperation. Coming up with new ideas is valuable for innovation. Energizers are things you do just for you. For instance, for me its walking in nature. Or creating something. Every now and then I grab the sowing machine and just start sowing. Just for me. It’s not about the result, it’s the process that does the trick. It makes me happy. Again, this can be many things. It can be doing yoga or having drinks with your friends. It can also change over time. Things may lose their shine and new things may surface that really make you happy. That’s fine.

What makes you *you* are the things that come naturally to you (talents) and the things that fire up your energy (energizers). But that’s not all. The third thing to think about when we figure out our identity are our life’s experiences. What has happened *to* us, and especially what has happened *through* us.

We cannot change what happens to us. When you are in a car and have an accident, this happens to you. There is nothing you can do about it. These happenings - good or bad - are part of us. Some experiences - especially the bad ones – may leave a scar. It’s how we deal with these situations that show who we are. That’s where we shift to the things that happen *through* us. Whatever we are faced with, we have a choice on what to do. We always have a choice. Although it may take a while to be ready to make a choice, it’s important to know that we always have a choice. And equally important to note is that any choice is good, as long as it’s your own.

---

<sup>10</sup> Luk Dewulf is a pioneer of talent-based thinking in Belgium and the Netherlands and author of several books on talent. He is also the driving force behind the talentwhisperer movement for children together with Els Pronk.

<sup>11</sup> Sir Ken Robinson (1950 –2020) was a British author, speaker and international advisor on education in the arts to government, non-profits, education and arts bodies. “The element, how finding your passion changes everything” was published in 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Michael J. Meade is an American author, mythologist and storyteller. I recommend watching his lecture about the Nature of Genius at Stanford University, 2014.

Let me give you a personal example. A tough one. My mum – I wrote about her at the beginning of this book – had a drinking problem. It started in her fifties when she got breast cancer and lost one of her breasts. She recovered from the cancer, but never truly from what this did to her body. It was hard to see her on her difficult days, to try to talk to her and make her change her ways. That happened *to* me. Then on to what happened *through* me. Years ago, I found a postcard. It said, ‘No matter how hard you try, you always end up like your mother’. A card that made me laugh, at first, but with the years it made me think. I drank too. A glass of wine. Then another one. And another. After the wine a grappa or a whisky. I could drink a lot. And once I lived on my own it was easy to just drink until the bottle was empty. It helped me to relax, after a busy or stressful day. I knew it wasn’t good for me. And for years I had been trying to cut down on drinking. I would be ok for a week or so, but then there was a party, or a bad day. And I’d just open a bottle of wine. I also told myself that the drinking helped my creativity. Loosening up with the alcohol, to be able to create something new. This all happened through me. It was my choice to continue to drink. This was part of me.

But one day I realized that I could read all the books there were, do any course I could find or pay any therapist out there, the only thing that would really make a difference is my own behavior. And so, I quit. And I made a plan – or rather a promise. To never drink again. I knew that having just one glass would lead to having another. So, I haven’t had alcohol since. Being someone who doesn’t drink is now part of my identity. I made a choice to be that kind of person. This happened through me. But it took a while...

With what happens through us, we show our real face. Our choices, our decisions, they lead to action, our actions. Our identity is about owning these actions. In my example, whether it is continuing to drink (a conscious decision and action) or to stop drinking. You have to own what happens *through* you, even if these actions are not a nice story to tell. They are part of who you are.

We all have moments in our life when things don’t work out as we wanted them to. These learning moments are part of what defines us. It’s no good ignoring them. They will bounce back asking for you to do something with them, at some point or another. Asking for something to happen through you. It can be hard, and it may take a while to be able to take on the responsibility to act. Not acting, letting the ‘happening to us’ be the end state, is also a

choice. I call that unfinished business. Until you dare to face it you chose to remain the victim. But realize that remaining the victim is what is happening *through* you. You may not want to hear this, but taking care of yourself, facing your identity, means you need to face the truth about who you are. About the choices you are prepared to make or not to make. The good and bad. Our life's experiences, and the choices we make because of them, are unique to us. No one leads a similar life. No one is the same.

Looking at my life there have been a few defining learning moments, besides the one I just mentioned. There was a moment when I was working in London. I was on the right track for a promising career in the international hotel business. This was my dream job. I had worked hard to get it, but once there it didn't feel like a dream. And so, I quit. It was a scary decision because I didn't know what to do next. This career path, that didn't turn out as I had expected, happened to me. I decided to steer away, despite the uncertainty. That happened through me.

Another moment was when I decided to end my marriage. Although I really wanted to make it work, with my own parents as my role models, having been in a marriage for over 50 years, but my marriage wasn't working. The relationship was damaging for my daughters and for me, and so I decided to get a divorce. Like with the drinking, this choice followed a previous choice to stay in the relation, until at some point I knew I couldn't go on like this.

Although I have touched upon the good and the bad, I would like to go into this a bit further. Life has its beauty and its ugliness too. Just like there is light and there is dark. The one is nothing without the other. Without unhappiness we would not be able to tell what happiness is. Acknowledging both as equal parts of our existence is very helpful. However, in our life we see – and show - mostly the good side. It's as if the other side is not there. Or not supposed to be there. But it is. We don't like talking about the darker side of life. But we all have darker thoughts. Darker moments, even darker decisions. I sometimes think about dying. I sometimes feel alone. And in my life, I have made some choices that I am not proud of. It's the dark side of me that is allowed to be there, just like the bright side of me. In our world maybe it's even more important to invite yourself to start seeing that dark side. To allow it to be there because it has been unseen for so long. To bring back the balance of who you are.

A final thought. The things that happen through us, are not unchangeable. It's not fixed. Our life is an endless series of choices, decisions, and actions. It's not just one that defines us. Also, one choice can be replaced by a different choice later in life. My personal example illustrates this.

### Exercise

*This is an exercise to open up to the dark side of your being. This exercise involves writing, so get a pen and paper. Think of something in your life that you are not proud of. It can be a dark secret. Maybe it's something that has been bothering you for a long time. It can be some unfinished business. Or a choice that you can't change anymore. Make it specific. What happened, at what moment, and what did you do? Now give this situation – and the choice or action you made - a name, as if it were a thing. So, for instance I would name the situation with my mum the 'drinking game'. The next step is the writing part, where you write it a letter. Describe what happened, what you did, why you did this and how it makes you feel. So: "Dear [name of your situation], I am [your name], and you are part of who I am. This is what happened [describe it]. This is what I did [describe it]. And this is how you make me feel [describe]. You [name of your situation] are part of me. And that is ok."*

*You can take this exercise to the next level if you are writing about unfinished business. Because this can be the starting point of a new choice you make. And then you can trust that choice to paper and add it to the letter.*

*You can repeat this exercise for all the learning moments that you want to acknowledge. This is particularly helpful if you find it difficult to acknowledge the darker sides of your life. They happened, and they matter, and they are part of you. And remember, this is not your end state. Your life is an endless series of choices, decisions, and actions. There are always going to be new ones that are different from the ones before, and they also add to who you are.*

In the beginning of this chapter, I wrote about your life as a journey. Becoming who you are. This means that your identity is a work in progress. You are constantly changing and that is how it should be.

Up till now we have looked into three things: talents, energizers and learning moments. They are excellent guidance to figure out who we are. There are also other tools and models that can be helpful: Myers-Briggs, Management Drives or Clifford Strengths to name a few. I regularly do online tests. I use them as a mirror. Different tests may show me something I had forgotten. The self-research I have helped you with is a good start to build the picture of who you are. And remember, you are a work in progress. It's never finished.

Even more important than *knowing* who you are, through personal analysis and tests, is *feeling* who you are. Or just feeling that you are. Feeling you. This is an even bigger challenge. Over centuries we have come to nurture our mind, our ratio, our intellect, but our feeling has been neglected. Sometimes even shut off, because what it has to say, is something we can't deal with. It may be bothering us in continuing our role in the rat race of life. Performance machines shouldn't be hindered by feelings. But as humans we are supposed to feel. It's part of who we are. We shouldn't see it as hinderance, but as enrichment. So instead of shutting it off, it's time to get back to being in touch with our feelings.

Feeling is being able to listen to what your body has to say. There are simple and very effective ways that are open and accessible to all. My best bet for everyone is to start doing breathwork. It is simple and effective. Let me tell you how I discovered the impact of breathwork. For a while I'd been struggling with a frozen shoulder. It was really painful, and it bothered me in my work. A friend who is into modern healthcare advised me to look into my breathing. It seemed a weird thing to do to fix my shoulder, but it triggered my curiosity. I remembered hearing an interview on the radio a while ago with a New York journalist about a book he wrote: *Breath*<sup>13</sup>. The title was simple to remember, so I went online to find the book. It's by James Nestor. The book fascinated me. To learn that something so natural as breathing could go wrong. Or rather, that we can learn to improve it and by doing so improve our health. It's no mumbo jumbo but science-based advice. This book also taught me that there is plenty to learn about breathing, so when I happened to experience a breath circle, it was no surprise that the effect was way beyond what I could imagine. What I like most about breathwork, besides being super effective, is that it doesn't involve talking. We already talk so much, allowing our mind to run in circles, trying to figure things out. As if words can

---

<sup>13</sup> *Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art* by James Nestor, 2020.



always lead to answers. Sometimes it's good to shut up the mind and let your body do the talking. That's what breathwork does. There is a big global movement going on. More and more people are discovering the magic of breathwork and are becoming facilitators. So, the chances are pretty good that you can do this in your area. You can even join a breathwork session online, although my experience is that doing a breathwork circle – live with other people – is extra effective. As for my shoulder, I'm not saying this is how to cure your joint pain. I tried different things at the same time and at some point my pain was gone. But even without pain in my body, I try to join a breath circle every month, because I really enjoy how it activates my body.

There are also other ways of opening up to feeling who you are. For instance, through meditation. There are good meditation apps, like Calm and Headspace that offer very accessible meditations. Or check out what you can find on YouTube. I personally enjoy the short meditations by Mooji. Just try different ones until you find what works for you. If sitting still is difficult for you, then Yoga might be a way to get more in touch with your body. The aim of yoga is to allow the energy to flow. And that brings us back to the beginning of this chapter: Being who you are means that your energy is flowing as it should.

Our days are action heavy. We are busy with the next thing we should do, ticking the boxes on our to-do list. Or, we may be thought heavy people. In our head all the time. For most of us feeling is not a priority, it's not even a normal thing to do, so it's wise to make an effort to find a way to make it part of our day. It deserves to be there. The following exercise can help you with that.

### Exercise

*This is a short exercise to help you allow some feeling moments during your day. Set an alarm every few hours on your phone. Chose four moments throughout the day. Try to do it at random minutes, otherwise you may be waiting for the alarm to happen. When the alarm goes off, use it as a reminder to tune into your body. To feel. Ask yourself the question: What do I feel? Do a mini-scan, going through all your body parts to check if there is an area that is asking for your attention. If you spot an area that doesn't feel good, you can breathe into it. This may seem silly, but give it a try. I have found that it works. Just send your breath to this place. And then you can ask yourself: How am I feeling? Note that we first identify that you are feeling, and*

*then – only as a second step – you may try to make sense of it by finding out how you are feeling. We want to prevent our mind mingling too soon in this feeling exercise. Don't worry if you don't feel anything at first. It's normal to have non-feeling moments, especially when this is new to you. The more you practice, the more you will be able to feel.*

There is nothing wrong with self-love

Now let's talk about self-love. It's like the icing on the cake. Except it's no luxury, it's part of your identity. In our modern culture self-love is either something associated with visiting the spa, getting a massage or maybe even shopping. Treating yourself to some money spending moment. Or we think of it as being vain. To me self-love is the end state. The thing to aim for. That if you know and feel who you are, and when you look in the mirror, you are honestly proud of what you see. To love who you are, with all your genius and all your flaws. That you can say: "I love you". I know this is difficult. We have not been taught to look at ourselves in this way. But it's about time we start learning it. Even baby-steps is a good way to move in this direction. So just get going.

Individualism versus individuality

Before we end this part about Identity, I feel I need to say something about individualism. Identity has nothing to do with feeding our ego. On the contrary, it is about getting rid of our ego and accepting who we truly are, not who we think we should be. In that sense individuality is not the same as individualism. Individuality – embracing your identity – gives you a sense of independence and freedom, allowing you to really connect with yourself. Individualism, on the other hand, is making yourself the end state of everything. A world that is about nothing more than 'me'. A dealbreaker if you want to be connected.

Wrapping it up for Identity

Our first layer for connection is Identity. It's the biggest and most difficult layer of all. Because it sets the stage for everything that will follow. The key question is Who are you?

I have led you through three areas for personal analysis. To discover your talents, your energizers and identify your learning moments. Important to note is that acknowledging who you are also means that you embrace your dark side. And finally keep in mind that who you

are is a journey. Our life is all about becoming who we are. So, it keeps us busy until the moment we die.

*Being connected with yourself – IDENTITY –  
means that you know how you are,  
you feel who you are, and you are OK with who you are.  
I know who I am, I feel who I am, I accept who I am, I love who I am.*

Continuing to explore who you are will help you to deepen the connection with yourself, and through that also open the door for deepening in the layers that follow.

Identity from an organizational perspective

Just like for individuals the first layer for organizations to be truly connected is to know who they are and to be ok with who they are. It's about embracing your uniqueness. Just think of a few different organizations and how you relate to them. What makes you relate? It's probably something significant, although it can be small, that you don't see in other organizations. And then think of organizations that don't get you beyond 'meh'. You don't really care for them. They have nothing that makes them stand out, making it hard to connect with them. With regards to this layer there is a book that I highly recommend: 'Change to strange'<sup>14</sup> by Daniel Cable Professor of Organizational Behaviour at London Business School. The title says it all. The book shows how 'strangeness' of an organization is a foundational value and should be nurtured in every business aspect. For instance, innovation is a key element of 3M. Without being able to be innovative 3M loses its value and its relevance. The book has many more examples. For instance, a timber company that employs carpenters as truck drivers, who can give advice on how to apply the wood wherever they deliver. It's in their core. How amazing is that?

So, for a company it is essential to understand what you are, and that also means that you should acknowledge what you are not. To find the strangeness within and elevate that. Organizations that try to be everything get lost in anonymity. Also, just like with people, you cannot be what you are not. You can have ambitions to evolve into a certain direction, but you have to work with your foundation. And that is what you already have. Your people and your products. Especially the people define the core of who you are as an organization.

---

<sup>14</sup> Change to Strange: Create a Great Organization by Building a Strange Workforce, 2007

A final word about Identity in organizations. You can also imagine that companies with a strong identity are a magnet for specific people that align with this uniqueness from their own identity. That's how connection works. Just like magic.

## Dare to be authentic

The second layer of the Conexus Model is Authenticity. Once you know and feel who you are and are OK with that (Identity) it's important to dare to show yourself once you are with other people. This seems easy, but how often do we put on a mask? We take on a role and act according to what we think is expected of us. We enter the room, but we leave ourselves at the door.



Connection requires us to bring our whole self to the table. To leave the mask at home. Brené Brown<sup>15</sup> is an expert in authenticity and vulnerability. In her book 'Dare to lead'<sup>16</sup> she invites leaders to drop the armor. We don't need the protection it may seem to give us. It hinders us more than that it helps us.

### Exercise

*Just a simple exercise to reflect on your own habits. Think of a situation when you were your true self. Again, being specific is important. What was the situation? Who were there with you? What did you do? And think of another situation where it was quite the opposite. You played a role or wore your mask. Just relive those moments in your mind and see how they were different.*

Life should be simple. If only we dare to be who we are. Always. But somehow, we lose our innocence and natural way of being, which is so normal for us as a child, and while growing up we start taking on roles. We transform into being actors. Tuning our presence and our being to what we think is required in different situations with different people. To be connected we need to shake off that habit.

Now let me tell you a story. Just across the street from the office in Utrecht where I worked, is a coffee place. It's a social company. The people that work there have a brain injury which makes working in a regular environment too demanding. I was there with a colleague, and we

---

<sup>15</sup> Brené Brown (1965) is an American professor, lecturer, author, and podcast host. Brown is known in particular for her research on shame, vulnerability, and leadership, and for her widely viewed TEDx talk in 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Dare to Lead. Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts; Brené Brown, 2018.

ordered two cappuccinos. With a smile we were asked to take a seat. The coffee would be brought to our table. A few minutes later the waitress arrived, but when she put down my coffee, the coffee spilled leaving a wet saucer. I said, “No worries, it’s fine”. But she insisted. She wanted to give me a perfect cup of coffee. So, she took it back and returned with a perfect one. When I asked her how long she had been working there, she shared her story. Twelve years ago she was run down by a car. She had been in coma for weeks. And it had taken her years to get where she was now. This was the first job that suited her. She really wanted to make it work, but everything she did, she needed to do with intention. It was a very special moment, for her to confide in us.

She was authentic. She made a connection. She showed what it is to truly be human. No robot can copy this. Being who you are - putting yourself out there, connecting with the customer. She – Miriam - is forever my favorite waitress.

To me this story shows how Miriam knows who she is – with all her gifts and flaws – and she dares to show herself. She brings herself to the table. No armor, no mask. Nothing more – or less – than her true being. Shouldn’t we all dare to be like her?

The paradox of vulnerability

To be connected you need to be authentic. This also ties into vulnerability. Being authentic means that you are at least more vulnerable than if you weren’t authentic.

There is this thing with vulnerability that I have a problem with. It somehow implies that you are taking a risk. When I look up the meaning of the word vulnerable it says, ‘exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally.’

I wonder if that is true. When we talk about being vulnerable, we mean that you show 'yourself', at least more of yourself. That you take off your mask. And according to the official meaning that also includes some kind of risk.

Now think of a moment when someone hurt you emotionally. What happened and how did it happen? Was it because you were being vulnerable? I dare to state that it was probably the opposite. That you were hurt because you weren’t showing your true self.

In general people are good at heart. We are not set out to hurt each other. In his book “Humankind” Rutger Bregman challenges the general belief that humans are bad, proving that we – as humans – are hardwired for kindness. And I agree with him. In essence, people are good. I really believe that.

If you open yourself up, if you dare to show who you really are, isn't it true that the other person won't actually hurt you?

And let's turn it around. If you really know someone, then you make sure that you don't say anything that would hurt the other person. Don't you? Instead of seeing vulnerability as something that is risky, I believe it's actually less risky than not showing your true colors.

Another little story. A few years ago, I lived in Amsterdam. Every day I would walk along the quay with my two dogs, where they are allowed to walk off-leash. But joggers also love to run on the quay. Sometimes we would come across a woman, always dressed in black clothes with a stern look on her face, who does some kind of speed walking. My dogs would always run towards her which would disturb her rhythm and obviously she would be irritated. So, when I would see her coming, I'd call the dogs and keep them with me until she had passed. But on this day, I spotted the woman too late. The dogs ran at her again and I already imagined what would happen. She would respond by yelling at me about the dogs. But then she said something I wasn't prepared for. 'Why are you laughing? Is this funny to you?' I was so surprised that I actually did smile somewhat nervously. Thinking that I should yell back at her saying it's an off-leash area so she should just get used to it. But instead, I told her the truth. That I was always checking to see if I saw her coming, because I didn't want her to be bothered by the dogs. That I was stressed because I knew I was too late. Then she relaxed too and told me she was scared of dogs because she had been bitten by a dog in the past. She knew my small dogs wouldn't hurt her, but she was still afraid. That's why she always reacted that way.

I'd opened up – being vulnerable you could say – and in doing so, she in turn did the same. Can you see that it was precisely this openness – the authenticity, staying true to who you are – that took the heat out of this situation?

While there are great depths to explore with Identity, with Authenticity it's quite simple. Just dare to be you. That is the key thing. Don't leave anything behind. It may feel weird if you have been wearing masks for a while, if you start being authentic all of a sudden. And for other people it may be something they need to get used to, when you start showing your true face. That doesn't mean that it's not worth it. Being connected can't happen if you don't pull through on all four layers of the Conexus Model. You can't skip any of them. So, take small steps. Start doing it consciously. Allow yourself to be you. Experiment and feel how it feels. Once you experience that it's OK, that it's safe to be you, you can expand.

Someone once asked me what to do if you strongly disagree with someone. How should you react? Important to note is that it's not about being disrespectful. Being authentic is not a free ticket to scold someone because you feel like it. If someone hurts you, or if someone makes you angry, being authentic means that you tell the other person how you feel. It's also okay to show your feelings. And allow the other person to be authentic too. It's as easy as that. You'll see that there is room for both of you to show your true selves.

*Showing your true colors – AUTHENTICITY –  
means that you take off your mask.*

*Bringing you whole self to the table when you are with others.*

One last thing about authenticity. This is not a communication thing. It's not only about what you say. Maybe even more important is what you do, how you behave. Staying true to your values and your beliefs in your decisions and actions.

Authenticity from an organizational perspective

Again, the parallel with organizations is easy. Once you know who you are, and are clear about your identity as an organization, then authenticity follows logically through consistency. To pull your essence through, not only in the communication of the organization, but also in the actions. Showing your true face. Nowadays the general public expects companies to take a stand. To show and tell what they believe in. This is where authenticity comes in. It's a prerequisite for trust. If you start showing different faces then you will not be perceived as authentic. This will stand in the way of building strong relations – of being truly connected – with your employees, your customers and your stakeholders.

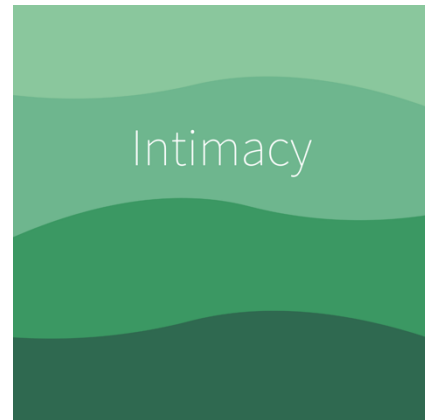


To understand what authenticity means for organizations it helps to think of different companies and brands. What do they show of themselves? What do they say and what do they do? Some companies develop great brand stories, but in real life their actions show a completely different side of them. Then authenticity is an issue. There must be a solid alignment of what the company is (Identity), and what they show to the world, including their internal culture. This means that every individual in the company, when acting on behalf of the company, should show behavior that fits the identity, contributing to experiencing the authenticity of the company. It's like a hologram. Each part contains the whole.

## The power of Intimacy

After our first two layers it's now time to dive into the power of Intimacy. I find this powerful because you can literally feel the energy flowing.

This layer is called intimacy, because of the strong interconnectedness you can feel between you and the other. It has nothing to do with sex or physical connections. It relates to the flow of energy between people.



Intimacy happens when you are truly connected to another person. This can happen when you both bring in your identity and authenticity. You are both open to connect from heart to heart. Words aren't even required to experience this.

You may recognize this situation. You are walking in the street. Just looking around. You have an open mind. And then your eyes are caught by someone else. Someone you have never met or seen before. Your eyes meet and, in that moment, you feel a click. It's just a nanosecond. But you can feel it happening. And it will probably bring a smile to your face. I'm sure you have experienced this before. It just happens, without looking for it you had a magical moment of connection.

I am sure that if we would scientifically analyze this situation to see what happens in the brain and in the hormones of both people, it will show that this moment sparked something.

I see you, and you see me

In essence this is what happens in the layer of Intimacy: 'I see you, and you see me'. Coming with an open heart will allow another person to connect with their open heart. Instead of our daily habit of connecting from head-to-head, this is a connection from heart to heart. Both people bring who they are and allow the other to be who they are. There is mutual respect and allowing space. This is what a true connection looks like.

The performance ‘The artist is present’ by the artist Marina Abramović<sup>17</sup> is an excellent showcase of intimacy in action. For three months in a row Marina sat behind a table for eight hours a day in the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA). Visitors were invited to take a seat on the other side of the table. There was no talking. All she did was look the other person in the eyes. “It was a complete surprise...this enormous need of humans to actually have contact”, Marina said about her performance. Many people sitting across here were moved to tears. That is what really being seen can do to you.

Sometimes I say that we live in a time where we are faced with a new kind of poverty. The lack of being connected, despite (or maybe due to) the overwhelming presence of social media. We are deprived of being truly connected, although it’s an essential human need. We long for it. And when we are restricted in being able to connect, as was the case in the Covid pandemic, we came to realize how important it is. And the good thing is that the examples I have shared show that it’s not as hard as it may seem.

I would like to add that there are two sides of a connection. The receiving part, and the giving part. It is an amazing gift to be seen by someone. To be really seen as who you are. That you are ok just as you are. It can be an experience with a complete stranger. The example from the performance of Abramović shows that words are not required. But there are many more examples you can think of. Words may even stand in the way. Making a connection is easy. All it takes is openness. In this case literally bringing your true self to the table and allowing space for the other to do the same.

### Exercise

*I know you are reading this book on your own, but if you have the chance, it would be amazing to do an experiment with a group of people. Maybe your team at work or with a group of friends. It does help if you don’t know people too well.*

*And then repeat the example of ‘The artist is present’. Just sit opposite of someone and stare each other in the eyes. Not for a minute, but stay there for as long as you want. You could put a timer on for five minutes, if you want some structure, but it would be amazing if you allow yourself to sit for as long as you want, and that could extend way beyond the 5 minutes. Once you get over the uncomfortable feeling and*

---

<sup>17</sup> Marina Abramović (1946) is a Serbian conceptual and performance artist.

*the little voice in your head telling you that this is silly, you'll go into a flow where the exercise starts to make sense. Enjoy!*

I would really love for you to experience this kind of connection without words with someone. As I said at the beginning, it's powerful.

Although up till now the examples have been wordless, being truly connected with someone else can of course also happen when we talk. It's just that words are strongly linked to our mind - our head - and that tends to get in the way. The essence in a conversation - with intimacy - is to allow the other person to be who they are. We are inclined to want to change the other person. With positive intentions. Wanting to help the other. But it's not about changing. It's about the moment. A stand still in time where you both acknowledge what is there.

Maybe you have heard about deep listening. That fits in very well with intimacy. While being you (you are bringing yourself to the table), you do your best to understand the other person. Remember – without trying to change that person. You ask questions to grasp the other person's point of view. It's about putting the 'I see you' to practice within the conversation. Translating it into the questions you ask, and your response to what is being said. Allowing what is to be.

It may be obvious, but I'll mention it anyhow, that you should refrain from judgement. Just like you want to be seen just as you are, the other person needs to be seen and treated that way too.

Maybe the most important and difficult thing is to resist from moving into action. Towards some kind of movement. Being in the moment is what's called for.

Ubuntu – I am because you are

While writing about intimacy it makes sense to share a concept that comes close: Ubuntu.

Ubuntu originates from the indigenous peoples of Africa. Literally the word "ubuntu" means

humanness. In general Ubuntu is explained as ‘I am because you are’. Desmond Tutu<sup>18</sup>, the South African Anglican bishop and theologian, known for his work against apartheid, explains it as the essence of human being. ‘It celebrates the wonder of our diversity, to go and be who you are.’ The foundation of Ubuntu is the strong sense of community in African culture. Taking care of each other: ‘How can one of us be happy if others are sad?’ The essence of Ubuntu is similar to what I describe in the concept of Homo Conexus. As said before, the concept is nothing new – and once you start thinking about it, the answer will always be the same - although in our Western culture we have a lot of catching up to do before we are on par with the African sense of community. Our individualistic culture has gotten in the way of the giving and sharing essence, that is also part of humanity.

Every now and then we find hints of Ubuntu in our Western culture. A few years ago the French filmmaker Maylis de Poncins<sup>19</sup> made a short video called “Je suis donc tu es” – I am because you are. The video was an entry to the annual Nikon Film Festival. It’s worth looking it up. In the video you see a young woman on her way to work. She bumps into an elderly man. The woman yells at him to watch his step. The man stares at her as she runs off and to his surprise, he finds a black ball in his coat. Then we see the same man standing in line at a store. A woman, who is in a hurry, asks him if she can come first. But the man snaps at her that she is not the only one in a hurry and should just wait her turn. A little later the woman also finds a black ball in the pocket of her coat. Then we see the same woman calling her husband. She is irritated because she has been trying to get a hold of him, but he wasn’t answering his phone. The man explains that he’s at work and can’t talk right now. The man, too, finds a black ball. He works as a waiter. Two women sit at a table on the terrace of the place where he works and ask him if they can order something. The man tells them off. They can’t sit at that table, because it’s a table for four, and they are only two. There is no one else here, the women react with surprise. They still have to move, he says sternly and walks away. One of the women is the same woman from the beginning of the story, and she too finds a black ball in her jacket. Moments later we see the same woman. She is at home, sitting on her bed. She takes the black ball out of her bag and throws it on the floor. It bounces and finds a spot among dozens of other black balls scattered around the floor. The next morning, we see the same woman again. She is sitting on the floor between the balls, with a brush and a jar

---

<sup>18</sup> Desmond Mpilo Tutu (1931 – 2021) was a South African Anglican bishop and theologian, known for his work as an anti-apartheid and human rights activist.

<sup>19</sup> Maylis de Poncins is actress, producer and writer and produced the short film ‘Je suis donc tu es’.

of yellow paint. She is painting the balls yellow one by one. Then the movie starts again. The woman is on her way to work. She meets the old man again. This time she looks at him kindly. She takes a yellow ball from her bag and gives it to the man with a smile and wishes him a nice day. He turns the ball around and sees a smiley face. He smiles. 'Je suis donc tu es.'

I love how this short video shows that we pass on what we feel. The irritation, the bad energy goes from one person to the other, by ways of the black ball. But we have the power to shift things. Instead of sharing a black ball we can share a yellow ball and pass on positive energy. It's as easy as that.

Ever since I saw this video, I recognize these black ball moments. I am now able to bend the moment. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. It depends on the other person, but it's worth the try. And at least by refusing to take on the black ball you prevent yourself from taking on that bad energy. The ball bounces back and so the chain stops. We are connected to each other and pass on our energy to others. Willingly or unwillingly. What if we use that mechanism of passing on with a positive intention? Realizing that we are part of a chain. A link in the network, with an impact on other people, and other beings. Passing on yellow balls.

### Exercise

*Thinking of the metaphor of a black and yellow ball, try to think of a moment when you received a black ball. What happened and what did it do to you? Now think of another moment when you were passed a yellow ball. Again, think of what happened and what it did to you. How did each situation impact how you treat other people? You will see that it is much easier to spot the black-ball moments than the yellow ones. It's how we are. We tend to remember the bad things and forget about the good things. But doing this exercise will help you identify these black and yellow ball-moments in your life, and help you to act in a way that is helpful.*

By nature we are connected, even if we are not aware of it. Increasing our awareness and infusing our connection with positive intention will make a huge impact on humanity. It's so simple. If we change how we think it will change how we behave. Intimacy is the layer that

gets us truly connected as humanity. Ready for the final layer – to be connected with all there is.

*Intimacy is the full experience of 'I see you and you see me'.  
A moment when energy flows between two people,  
because they both come with an open heart. Being, just as they are.*

A few final words with regards to Intimacy. A true connection between people can only happen if people are on the same level. Without equality a connection will always be unbalanced. Although we are all different – our uniqueness is our gift – we are all equal. One person no more important than the other. Age, gender, culture, you name it. They are all irrelevant.

Intimacy from an organizational perspective

I love explaining this bit because it is so relatable. Being a business professional, you will probably think of customer intimacy, and you are quite right to do so. Because that is what this level of connection is about, for customers. But customers are not your only audience. I would like to invite you to create the same level of intimacy with employees and other stakeholders. Wouldn't it be wonderful if your organization would be able to develop intimate relationships with all your contacts? That would make life so much more enjoyable for all involved. If you can make a connection with your customers, employees and stakeholders on an intimacy level, you are going to be fine. But it goes wrong all the time.

Before I share an example let me describe the essence. It's easy. Intimacy happens when an organization respects the other person for who he or she is through their actions and communication. To allow the other their perspective and experience. It goes both ways, but as an organization it's important to set the stage for this level of connection to happen. To be accessible. To be in listening mode and have time to listen. To set the right conditions.

Let me share a situation that happened between me and my bank. Years ago, I wanted to sell my house. Because of my divorce my ex-husband had to be released of liability for the mortgage before I could go through with the sale. This involved some paperwork which was coordinated by the mortgage advisor from the bank. It seemed a simple straight forward

process. I had provided all the information the bank needed. I knew my financial situation was solid enough. I already had a real-estate agent ready to put my house on sale. But somehow it took forever. Although I kept asking the mortgage advisor about the progress, he couldn't give me any clarity about the steps in the process and the timelines. Nothing seemed to happen. After weeks of waiting, I ran out of patience and I filed a complaint through the bank's website. After a few weeks I still hadn't heard anything from the bank. So, I decided to send an email to the CEO of the bank. I received a standard email telling me that they would get back to me within three weeks. This seems a really long time in our 24/7 economy, but I decided to sit it out. Three weeks passed and still nothing had happened. I sent another message. I also tried other channels, such as Facebook, but I was told that my complaint was already dealt with the highest priority. There was nothing more they could do. I had to wait.

Finally, I got a response. In the meantime, I hadn't heard anything from my mortgage advisor either. The email I received was rational, probably checked by the legal department, explaining that correct procedures and timelines had been followed. That was it. No further assistance. Nothing. This felt like a slap in the face. It left me feeling powerless and misunderstood. And also, I was no step further towards releasing the liability.

As I couldn't get through using the regular process, I kept calling the bank until finally I got someone on the phone who understood me and put things in motion. This individual acknowledged how the situation made me feel. Within a week the liabilities were fixed and I could proceed with selling my house.

The story doesn't end here. A few weeks later I heard that the complaint department of the bank - who sent me that legal 'cold' email - had sent flowers to my ex-husband's new home. As an apology to me. Yes, you read that right. After the unpleasant and unhelpful email, they sent flowers, to an address that should not be connected to me. It made me laugh, it made me wonder and it was about to make me relive the frustration. But I decided to dismiss it, not allowing the bank to further rule my emotions, and to be grateful that I had found a person who did want to help me.

Now what does this example show? To me it is all about acknowledging how a person feels. Allowing me to feel frustrated and letting me know that that's ok. Instead of turning a cold



shoulder. It has nothing to do with who is right and who is wrong. Subjectivity is more important than objectivity.

The example also shows the two possible responses, and the different impact they have. The first one is the formal, rational email. An example of a head-to-head connection – a black ball. The impact is disconnection. And it fires up negative feelings towards the bank.

The second response enables a true connection. The person heard me, took time to listen and understand the situation and how it made me feel. Here a true connection happened. The ‘I see you and you see me’ situation. It was a connection from heart to heart. Comparing these situations is like looking into different worlds. The world of the mind, and the world of the heart.

Another thing I would like to add is that responding in an open way, allowing the other person to feel what they feel and acknowledging that feeling – in my case frustration – makes way for compassion to follow. Wiping away all that happened before. Even a severe mistake can be forgiven if there is willingness to open up. You don’t need to bring in the legal perspective, because it’s not about who is right and who is wrong. It’s about establishing a connection. About building valuable relationships.

From a customer perspective I do not feel connected to the bank as an organization – even after all these years. However, I have come to trust the few people that I connected with. People that understood me. I treat them respectfully and they treat me accordingly. These are the people I will turn to, if I can. Regardless of where they work. If they would move to another bank, that would be reason for me to move too. This happens a lot of the time where relationships of a company are tied to individual employees. I know organizations would love to see it differently, but you need to understand where that comes from. This example shows how that works. The brand, the company doesn’t strengthen the relationship, as there is no real relationship between the organization and the customer. It will take some serious fixing – from identity, through authenticity and intimacy, to enable a real connection with customers. Getting the connection right is especially hard for large companies, because it involves many people, decisions, and actions. To all align them towards having meaningful connections. It’s worth it though. Because the companies that get it right are the ones that customers stick to.

Even if the company makes mistakes. And these are the companies that employees love to work for.

Let me also make a reference here to the black and yellow ball moments I wrote about earlier, related to the video 'Je suis donc tu es'. Within organizations this can also be an extremely powerful metaphor. What if, as a company, you make it part of your strategy to pass on yellow balls. The first response from the bank in the example above was obviously a black ball. Things started to change once someone made an effort to pass me a yellow ball. It makes all the difference. The power of this metaphor and the video that you can use to illustrate it, is that everyone gets it. It is extremely easy to translate this into your daily work. A brief daily reflection at the end of the day, on the black and yellow ball moments of the day can be very helpful to make it part of your routine. Especially if you look into the missed opportunities to bounce back a black ball, or to pass on a yellow ball. Once you start thinking about it in this way, you will start seeing and grabbing the many opportunities.

Another area I would like to touch upon that relates to the layer of intimacy is diversity and inclusion. An important area of attention in any organization but somehow it's difficult to create breakthroughs, despite the good intentions. The layer of intimacy is a way of putting diversity and inclusion into action. After all, it's all about acknowledging everyone's uniqueness. Allowing people to come as they are. 'I see you, and you see me'. Yes, it can be that easy. A company culture that values true connections, has to be a company that supports intimacy and therefore supports diversity and inclusion.

## With Inclusiveness we move towards wholeness

Now we move on to the fourth and final layer: Inclusiveness. This is the one that ties everything together. The layer that makes all the previous layers worth it. Of course, it's good to be connected with yourself and with other people. That in itself has value. However, we set off on this journey because we have bigger problems to solve. Societal problems. This fourth layer is getting us there. As mentioned before, every layer has its importance, and the layers have a particular order. Going from me to we to totality. Building up from within.

Without making a connection with yourself, you cannot follow through with the next levels. It's an illusion to think that there are people who are very good at connecting with other people who don't need that connection with themselves. If you don't connect with yourself first the connection with others is superficial, without depth and meaning. You will be able to recognize that now. Similarly, there are people who feel a strong connection with the universe. They may even call it the spiritual world, but they don't care that much for being connected on other levels. They seem disconnected and tied in their own bubble. You cannot connect with them, because they are not yet connected with themselves. Connection is not a spiritual journey. It's a natural way of being, although it doesn't come naturally to use anymore. We have to learn what we have forgotten. Connection is built from within, and then layer by layer expanding that connecting with a bigger outer circle.

The final layer is our aim. Inclusiveness is where you realize that you are part of something bigger than you. That you are connected to all there is. Beyond just people. This book is not a self-help book. This book is here to help you heal the world. Because you can. Inclusiveness is the key. Once we've all found the key, the future of our world, of a better world, will be secured. Because once we realize that everything is connected, we will be able to solve the challenges of our time together.



While I am writing this I am staying on the island Orø in Denmark. When people ask me to describe the place, I tell them it is beautiful, there is nothing to do, but the wifi is good. I am

staying here in a ‘sommerhus’, a cabin overlooking the water. Just me and my dogs. Days go by when I don’t see anyone. But I am not alone. Apart from the dogs there are butterflies, hedgehogs, birds.

A few times a day I walk along the waterside, through the grass so high it touches my knees, feeling blessed. This evening the wind had died down, the sun was fading, and the water was on a low. Small rocks were peeking through the water. Birds had picked a stone to rest on. A peaceful sight. In this surrounding it’s easy to be connected with all there is. Amidst nature I feel humble. I am no more than a bird on a rock. Grateful to be part of this. To enjoy this. To be a guest of planet Earth. Who needs stuff when you can have this, I think to myself. And we have it. Now, but tomorrow? I am not so sure, and it confirms what I already knew. This it’s worth fighting for.

In the busy city it’s not so easy to feel that connection. The noise of traffic that never seems to stop. There are people everywhere. We live and work in buildings that reach the clouds. Here in Orø instead of having Teams meetings with my colleagues, I make jokes that the birds are having a conference. They can get pretty loud sometimes. Even nature has its gatherings. But in the city many days go by when you may only get to be outside for a few minutes. That’s why taking some time to be in nature is so important. To get away from the noise and hear the wind and the birds. When was the last time your bare feet touched the damp grass? Connecting with Earth, literally. There is no better way to connect with all there is than to be awed by the beauty of nature.

Of course, going abroad to be in nature is lovely, but there’s nature everywhere. And you shouldn’t save these connection moments for your holidays. You need more of it than that. Back at home I go into the forest almost every day to feed that connection. So, find out where you can be in nature, within the area you live. It can be a park. It can even be just one tree. And just be with it. Feel it’s beauty. It’s being, just as it is.

In his book ‘Walden<sup>20</sup>’ the writer Henry David Thoreau<sup>21</sup> describes how he needs being in nature to feel he is alive. “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front

---

<sup>20</sup> Walden of Life in the Woods, by Henri David Thoreau, 1854

<sup>21</sup> Henry David Thoreau (1817 – 1862) was an American naturalist, essayist, poet, and philosopher.

only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” Another thing that strikes me about this quote is how Thoreau looks at nature to learn from. Nature as teacher. From where I am now- in Orø - I can confirm that nature is a splendid teacher, making me look forward to the years ahead full of learnings, yet to come.

In the following quote Albert Einstein<sup>22</sup> explains how we are holding ourselves captive by seeing ourselves as something separate from all there is. It’s time to get out of our cage. We now have the key.

“A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”

Adding to Einstein the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe<sup>23</sup> states: “In nature we never see anything isolated, but everything in connection with something else which is before it, beside it, under it and over it.” You cannot argue with that. And remember, we are creatures of nature too. So, we too should not be isolated. Let’s come out of our cage.

Einstein and Goethe are not the only ones to write about our connection to nature. About how we are a part of all there is. This idea is nothing new. Everything that we need to know has already been thought of. All we need is all we have, already. All of us. Our wisdom, our being. It’s enough. It’s time we start using it to serve us. To serve all of us and our planet. Because Earth is our home.

Once you feel that you are connected to all there is, you will experience things in a completely different way. Societal challenges such as climate change, affordable healthcare,

---

<sup>22</sup> Albert Einstein (1879 – 1955) was a German-born theoretical physicist, widely acknowledged to be one of the greatest and most influential physicists of all time.

<sup>23</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 – 1832) was a German poet, playwright, novelist, scientist, statesman, theatre director, and critic.

economic inequality, privacy and security are no longer things that are outside you. No, now they are part of you. And that is exactly what we need, to start taking the right action.

The writer Jonathan Safran Foer<sup>24</sup> puts people *in* the problem, instead of at a distance with his book 'We are the weather'<sup>25</sup>. That indeed is the solution. This book triggered me. How come we *know* there is a problem, we are impressed by the facts and figures that proves the vastness of it, yet we still don't take any action? This question has been haunting me for quite a while. The answer I now know is that we need to *feel* the problem as our problem. Not as a general problem; something that is *out there*. I can distant myself from 'out there problems', but I have to face my problems every day. Following the layers into the Homo Conexus mode is the way to make it part of me. Of us. To feel connected, instead of at a distance. It's the same idea as I discussed in Identity. The climate change can be happening to me – this is the 'out there' stage -, but once I connect, it is happening *through* me. My taking action or not taking action is then a deliberate choice that I have to take responsibility for.

Back to Foer's book. You can write it, you can say it, but how can we get to feel it too? You see, it doesn't work if you are not first connected with yourself and with others. That's why the previous layers are so important. To get to the solution phase, we need to do the groundwork. Once we have done that by connecting with ourselves and with others, we are ready to take on the responsibility that comes with being part of the bigger whole. As we feel ourselves being part of the problem, we can also feel ourselves being part of the solution. It is our own responsibility. By being connected that responsibility is no longer theoretical. It has transformed into something we can feel. It weighs on our shoulders, and we can't shake it off.

Can you see it?

If you follow the layers – one by one - from identity to authenticity to intimacy and then to inclusiveness, you will start to see the world in a completely different light. Your glasses are about to do their magic, giving you the ability to look at things from a new perspective. Because it's our home you are looking at. And we need to start taking care of it.

---

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Safran Foer (1977) is an American novelist.

<sup>25</sup> We Are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast, by Jonathan Safran Foer, 2019.

*Inclusiveness is about connecting to all there is.  
Beyond people. Realizing you are part of the universe.*

Inclusiveness from an organizational perspective

Inclusiveness may seem similar to inclusion. Yet it's not. Inclusion is about making it possible for people to be who they are. Regardless of anything – race, gender, cultural background, religion, etc. Providing equal opportunities. Allowing anyone to come as they are. In the way I explain it inclusion is part of Intimacy.

Inclusiveness is the act of being connected with all there is. That requires being inclusive, as I have explained in the previous layer (intimacy), but it's more than that. It's about feeling – as an organization – that you take up a role in the bigger picture. Feeling the responsibility and acting accordingly. Your decisions and actions show how you give meaning to the interconnectedness with all there is.

Let me tell you a little story about a customer service agent of a large company. She worked in a small office in a nowhere town. It was her job to help customers with their internet connection problems. Every week she called an elderly lady. This lady once called with a small question, mainly looking for someone to talk to. Searching for a moment of attention and real contact – even if it was short- because that was so rare in her everyday life. So, the call center agent had since made it part of her weekly schedule to give this lady a call. One day some people from the head office visited the office. She dare not say anything because this weekly conversation did not contribute to the continuing strive for efficiency. I had the privilege to be with this team for a little while, experiencing how they organized themselves. I was amazed about what I saw. Teamwork, having each other's back, taking responsibility. All hidden in an office that no one paid attention to. What I saw was being connected in practice. All four layers where part of their culture. Being connected with yourself, daring to show yourself, respecting the other and taking on the responsibility for the bigger whole. The company should have spotlighted this team, because there was so much others could learn from them. A few years later I heard that the small office had been closed down. The colleagues were made redundant. Good things gone to waste. Although not really. I know the people of that team are taking their way of being into other settings and inspiring others to be like that too.

This example shows that embracing inclusiveness comes down to your company culture. To pull through from the first layer until the last. Providing people in your company with a safe place to make decisions that are for the greater good, within their line of work. I love the concept of *the smell of the place*, that professor Professor Sumantra Ghoshal <sup>26</sup>shared at the World Economic Forum in 1995. Being from India, he talks about his annual visits to his hometown Calcutta. He goes there in July, because that's the only time his kids have a summer vacation. It's hot, crowded, cluttered and stuffy. There are so many people, lots of noise and the air is polluted. It makes him feel tired. Then he compares it to the feeling of spring in Fontainebleau in France, where he lives and works at INSEAD Business School. The air is fresh, nature is blooming. He says "the moment you enter the forest, there is something about the crispness of the air. There is something about the smell of the trees in spring. You want to jump, you want to jog, you want to catch a branch, to run, do something." According to Ghoshal many companies have developed a culture that feels like downtown Calcutta in summer, instead of spring in Fontainebleau. Cultures that smell like Calcutta in summer are about constraint, compliance, control, and contract. How different would it be if you have a culture that nurtured connection. Living the four layers of connection will get you there. But note that a culture change doesn't happen overnight. I have seen many culture programs fail. They start off by developing new values, designing fancy posters, appointing change agents and conducting workshops. Putting their people through the culture car wash, and then expecting the change to take form. The thing is, you can't force change upon people. People have to step in, one person at a time, and every person needs different things to be able to step in. Remember, we are all different. What you really aim for is a transformation. That is different than change. Transformation makes you move to a new reality that replaces the old. Old doors are forever closing behind you. The way to make this happen within an organization is not a culture program. It's providing the right conditions. To allow people to step in, to transform. Creating fertile ground, and taking care of the seeds, allowing them to grow.

Years ago, I met Subroto Bagchi<sup>27</sup>. At that time he was CEO of Mindtree, a large IT

---

<sup>26</sup> Sumantra Ghoshal (1948 – 2004) was an Indian scholar and educator. He served as a Professor of Strategic and International Management at the London Business School and was the founding Dean of the Indian School of Business in Hyderabad.

<sup>27</sup> Subroto Bagchi (1959) is an Indian entrepreneur and business leader. He is the co-founder of Mindtree, an Indian technology MNC.



company, based in India. Instead of calling himself the CEO he called himself the gardener. Showing his belief that it was his responsibility to tend to his people and his company as if it were a garden. Helping it to grow. A lovely and inspiring way of seeing the role of senior management in organization. To tend to the garden. To enable a fresh smell of the place. Again, it is amazing to see how helpful it is to use nature and taking care of nature as a metaphor.

ESG doesn't make people act differently

Many (maybe even most) companies voice a strong commitment to contributing to the Sustainability Development Goals (SDG's). In their annual reports listed companies show how they are taking their responsibility. A high score in the annual rankings, like the Dow Jones Sustainability Index, is what they aim for.

A lot of these companies have taken on ESG<sup>28</sup> - Environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) to help them succeed in doing well with regards to the SDG's. It's a framework; the corporate way to show that a company cares by incorporating social responsibility in their strategy. The next challenge for these companies – after having incorporated ESG - is to make their own employees care about ESG. But it's hard to care for something that feels so distant. Just like I described with the challenge of 'We are the weather'. And including words like 'governance' doesn't help. A word that only exists in the corporate world. And identifying with a framework is impossible. Please understand that the framework is just a tool. A tool that may not even be necessary if the people in the organization were connected with the world around them. If – as an organization – you make it part of your culture to be connected with yourselves, with others and with all there is, the drive will come from within, resulting in decisions and actions that support the ESG's. Now, sadly, focus is on internally 'selling' the framework. We shouldn't have to sell the care for our planet, should we? But don't worry. If you are into ESG and face this challenge, there is a different way. Don't make ESG something people should care for. Use it as the tool that it was designed to be. Not as a vessel for engagement. ESG is about policy. So, treat it like a policy. With regards to engagement, start focusing on connection. From me, to we, to totality.

---

<sup>28</sup> ESG (Environmental, social, and corporate governance) is an umbrella term that refers to frameworks designed to be integrated into an organization's strategy to create enterprise value by expanding the organizations objectives to include the identification, assessment and management of sustainability-related risks and opportunities in respect to all organizational stakeholders (including but not limited to customers, suppliers and employees) and the environment.

That's something that people can feel into. Use the four layers as your engagement roadmap. The most effective way is to support connection on an individual level and on an organizational level. The 'employee experience' – if you have an overview of what this is - is a good way to start, to see how you are facilitating being connected and where you can infuse this into the experience. Empowering people to be connected with me, we, and totality.

## Guidance for the model

Although the model is very self-explanatory, I would like to add a few notes to increase the impact of it. When you work with the model there are two things to keep in mind:

- Your ability to connect requires regular reflection. At some point in your life things may be going really well and you're nicely 'connected', but we all know that things happen that can throw you off balance. Life is full of surprises, and this means we have to adapt and reposition ourselves.
- Your ability to connect is not an individual journey. We are all part of a network and with that comes a responsibility. To feed the network. To give and take. Sometimes you have a giving role. Sometimes you receive.

### Being part of a network

Yes, we are part of a network. If you see the universe as a whole, we all play a tiny, tiny role in this bigger picture. Tiny, but significant. Our role in the network. I realize this is a very conceptual idea when we talk of the universe. But what if we translate the idea of being part a network to your own local community? Then we are talking about real people, with names and faces. Now it's much easier to understand the idea of being part of a network. We are in this together, and sometimes we need a little help from someone else, and sometimes we are the one to offer our help. That's how it works. You give and you take, without it being a deal. It's not a formal arrangement. It's giving by trusting that you will be given at some point. No one knows when. And maybe you are giving more, because you have more to give, and others take more because they need a little more. It evens out because there is enough for everyone. It's the principle of paying it forward. If we trust that this is the way it is, we're going to be all right.

### The power of giving

To illustrate the power of giving I would like to share this little story, about an experience I had years ago, when I had a burn-out. I had lost touch with myself. I was like a 'dead bird', as colleague described me. One day, I ran into a mum I knew from school. We had never really spoken to each other before. No more than 'hello'. And then she said: 'I think you're a very nice woman'. I was unable to respond. But those words, and that very moment, I remember

them well. Those were words I needed to hear, to feel for a moment that I'm okay the way I am. I had never thanked her for that and always thought I should. But now I see it's okay. She didn't say it because she wanted something from me. She said it to give me something, without expecting anything in return. I remember this moment often. It helps me to realize that we all have the ability to give someone something that he or she needs.

#### Deepening your connection

As powerful as the model is, it's not a tick in the box once you go through the layers. As your whole life is a journey, connecting and being connected will be part of that journey. A continuous expedition or exploration. As you connect you will discover new ways to strengthen and deepen your connection. But I will tell you a secret. The entry point of deepening your connections will always be 'identity'. Within Identity – connecting with yourself – there is an amazing depth to be found. Exploring who you are and embracing what you discover. Once you have touched upon this depth, you will bring this into the other layers. It follows automatically. There are many people who try to deepen their connection through the last level – exploring spirituality. It doesn't work that way. You may recognize these people. So full of '*what's out there*', but seemingly ignorant of their own being. Being connected is not a spiritual practice. It's as down to earth as you can get. It's natural and simple.

#### Three golden questions

The last tool I would like to share with you are three key questions. I have experienced that these questions can be very helpful. Years ago I discovered them. They are – in a way - a nice summary of the layers of connection that we just walked through and it also shows the relationship and interdependence of the levels of connection. Ask yourself:

- Is it good for me? (me)
- Is it good for someone else? (we)
- Is it good for the world? (totality)

You can see the logic and the relevance to all I have shared before. Start with yourself. If the answer to question one is 'no', then you abort. Only after a 'yes' will you proceed to the next. Three times 'yes' means GO!

Don't underestimate the power of you

Before wrapping it up with the four layers of connection I need to emphasize something that is really important. And that is the power of YOU. I know that for many people it's counterintuitive to start with taking care of yourself. People with a big heart tend to be very loving for everyone around them, but in doing so, they forget to love themselves. Similarly there are people with a big sense of responsibility who tend to take responsibility for other people, while they should start taking responsibility for themselves first. Taking care of yourself is everyone's own responsibility- as an adult. I know when you are a mum or a dad you have the responsibility for your kids too, but your kids also need you to be all of you. They need you to bring yourself to the table. To all the mums out there – and to all the dads that feel this way too: remember this!

To all these people – the ones with the big heart and the ones with the huge sense of responsibility - I would like to say that if you take care of yourself, you will be able to take even better care of other people. It's not selfish to connect with yourself. It's a necessity. Make it your priority. Keep in mind what I said about the difference between individuality and individualism. Individualism is feeding the ego. We have to stop doing that. But individuality is a good thing. Feeding your unique qualities will give you an unstoppable flow of energy and love for all those around you. And the ability to take on the world.

## Part 3: Coming full circle

In the previous chapters I have explained all four layers of the Conexus model. Giving you a new pair of glasses to see the world with different eyes. Are you seeing it?

Although the conclusion we started off with, that we are all connected, is a general conclusion shared by many philosophers and scientists throughout history, what has been missing in all these years is how to apply this wisdom. The practicality of the model fills in that gap, shining light on how to become more connected. To unlock our ability and satisfy our need for being connected, with ourselves, with others and with all there is. But, as with many things, only knowing is not going to get us there. It's the doing that needs to happen.

The four layers guide you into connecting inside out. Helping you with every layer on how to get further. It's a very simple concept. Easy to understand; even easy to explain to others. Now the ball is in your court. Waiting for you to make the next move.

So, what are you supposed to do? Start connecting!

No, seriously, you've done a lot already! The most powerful thing of this book is that it is making you think differently. Seeing yourself and the world with different eyes. Thinking of humans as connective magnets. Able of connecting, and in need of being connected. Thinking that connection starts with honoring who you truly are. Embracing yourself. Not your ego, but your true self. If you've come this far in the book, most of the work is already done. That way of thinking has been planted as a seed within you, and it will start to grow.

I am convinced that by starting to think this way, your actions will follow. You can't help it. It's going to happen. And that is the amazing beauty of it. It's the universal law of cause and effect. Everything changes if our thinking changes. Albert Einstein was challenging our thoughts all the time, because he knew the power of changing your thinking:

*“The world we have created is a product of our thinking; it cannot be changed without changing our thinking. If we want to change the world, we have to change our thinking...no problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it. We must learn to see the world anew.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## The impact on an individual level

Change will start happening, only because you have changed your thinking. So, what can you expect? You will be amazed and delighted about the impact. By making space for who you are, you will start to see that your potential is coming out. Honoring your talents and energizers, and taking on your learning moments, will allow you to step into your power. To shed off the skin that doesn't belong to you. You will start to allow yourself to dream your own dreams and to let go of dreams that we're imposed on you. You'll realize that you can make choices of your own. That you have what it takes to make those choices. You will be able to look into the mirror and like – love – the person you see.

You will start feeling that life is yours to live. Facing your light and dark side, without being afraid of what you see, because you know you can decide what happens through you. You will start feeling who you are, little by little, opening up to what your body is telling you. Starting to listen and co-create with what you have been given. You will embark on a journey and love the journey, although you know that you will face uncertainty along the way.

In this new way of thinking, feeling and living you will acknowledge the moments that are dark, because they are also part of what is. And allow them to be. Allow yourself and others to be in that dark, knowing that light will always follow. Just like the waves of the sea will always keep coming.

But most importantly, what you will experience is what it does to others. The amazing effect that connecting with yourself has on the people around you. It's that yellow ball you will hold in your hand and will be passing on to others. Bringing on positivity. And maybe if you come across someone that is not there yet, you can at least bounce off the black ball they are trying to give. To stop a chain of negativity catching on. Instead you are the engine behind a whole different chain. One of positivity. And one of opening new opportunities. New ways of doing things that suit our new way of seeing ourselves and the world around us. Empowering humanity to take the big steps that we have to take.

By getting in touch with our potential we will be able to make those big steps. Our being connected with ourselves, with others and with all there is, is the way to unlock that potential. It's all there. All we have to do is open the door. All we need it to see what is already in front



of us. Within us. Seeing is believing. Our doorway towards a better future. Because the essential step to move towards a better future is to feel that you are part of a bigger whole. That connection will start influencing the choices you make. You will start taking on the responsibility that comes with being connected with all there is. Choices that will help to solve the challenges of our time, because you now know that your choices matter.

Do you remember the question I asked you at the beginning of this book, to give you a personal starting point? I asked you to imagine your life as a clean slate. To design it from scratch. To make way for what felt as impossible.

Now is the moment to step into that reality. I have showed you the way. It's possible. Start by connecting with who you are. And I know that you'll find yourself there. All the rest will follow. Your life, and your dreams will start unfolding because you have started to live from inside out. From your essence. Making sense of who you are.

## The impact for organizations

Changing the way you look at yourself as an organization will change everything. It's no surprise that the solution I have provided comes in the form of a model. Organizations love models. It's their language. Having worked in corporate organizations for over 20 years I have learned to speak that language. It comes in handy here, because I believe that change cannot come about if we leave out the business perspective. We need to embark on this change together, on all levels. As individuals, as society, and as organizations.

The model is your roadmap towards being more connected. The four layers will help you see where you have work to do. You can use the model for a gap analysis, as a starting point. Identify how you are doing on Identity. Who you are as an organization, what your values and beliefs are, what your qualities are and the qualities of your people. You may identify some hidden qualities that you can start to embrace. Find out your uniqueness. Understand what your strength is, but also allow your dark side to be there. Acknowledge it. Please note that this is not the same as a SWOT analysis. Think of your organization as a being, as if it's a person.

Once you have analyzed the first layer, you can look into your Authenticity. How are you showing yourself? Is your face consistent, or do you show many faces? Look into the different audiences. Your own people, your customers and your stakeholders. Don't just look into your communications, but also into your policies and procedures. For instance people policies (hiring, development, remuneration, etc), supplier processes, customer service processes. In everything that dictates how you behave as an organization. Does it match your identity?

The third layer is to look into your Intimacy. Are you building meaningful relations? Are these relations tied to you as an organization, or are they tied to individuals working for you? Don't judge these people but see if you learn from them. Find out how these employees connect to transcend that towards the rest of the organization. Learn to work with what you have. You have your people. Learn from them, instead of making up some theoretical solution and imposing that on your workforce. The answer is always within. All you need is all you have. That's also true for organizations. Just acknowledge and be proud of what you have. Love yourself as an organization. I know it's an unusual thought, but wouldn't it be

amazing if you could get to that stage? In this layer it's also good to analyze your behavior as an organization from the black and yellow ball perspective. How are you doing? Are you more on the black side, or is there some yellow shining through? How can you induce the yellow-ball-way of doing things in more areas of your organization?

The final layer is looking into Inclusiveness. Again – much like I have mentioned with regards to individuals – it doesn't work to put this first. You need to be who you are, and then take on your responsibility for your role in the whole. Not the other way around. Follow the line from Identity, to Authenticity, to Intimacy and then look into Inclusiveness. It needs to make sense. Understand who you are, and how you relate to others (intimacy) and then acknowledge the responsibility that comes with taking up your role in all there is. Then it will not be an effort to engage your employees, your customers and other stakeholders in the decisions you make on this level. It will follow accordingly. You will even see that you can go way beyond what you thought was possible, because you are feeling a much stronger connection with all there is. So, your impact will increase significantly.

And no, you don't have to throw ESG overboard. It's a fine way of enabling reporting of your SDG efforts and being transparent in a way that works for other companies too. Just use it as the tool it was meant for, not as a strategy in itself.

I realize that going through this as an organization is no small task. It will take quite an effort to first analyze and then follow through with what needs to be done to make things better. The good thing is that the model is easy to understand. Getting more people on board with a similar way of thinking is a good first step and it will not take intensive courses to understand this line of thinking. To help you I have developed a one pager<sup>29</sup> – I know organizations love one-pagers – to start with creating common ground. And then start small. One thing to keep in mind is that for organizations – similar to individuals – the key is always within Identity.

Whatever you decide to do as improvements in any layer, make sure it makes sense from an Identity perspective. If it's hard to make a link, stop trying, then it's just not right for your organization. Your identity is your foundation. Always. It's always the starting point and everything should be explainable from Identity perspective. Just a small note about this inside

---

<sup>29</sup> See the back of the book for information about the downloads.

out approach. I hear some of you thinking that too many companies are already focused internally. I agree. But there are two significant differences. The way of thinking I propose is to connect from within towards what is outside. The whole purpose is to be better connected with your surroundings. The inside part is just the beginning of the process. It's not meant to stay there. The second difference is that mostly inward focus is aimed at improving processes and procedures for higher revenue or profit. Our aim is to contribute to a better world together. A last thing I would like to add with regards to this internal connection. Some of you may be thinking that in order to add value the outer world has to ask for it. So that the organization can respond to the needs of customers or society. In a way you are right. However, it's the people inside your company, empowered by the identity of the organization, that can think forward as to where the needs of your customers are going. So that the company can respond before the customer is able to give words to what they want. Responding to customers who are voicing their demands, means that some other company has beat you to it. No one asked for an Iphone...

The impact you may expect is that you will be an organization where people love working for. You will be a magnet for people who identify with who you are and who will bring in the unique qualities that you are known for. Your people will know that they can come and be as they are. Diversity and inclusion is not on the agenda, because who and how you are means that you embrace diversity. Inclusive is the only way to be. You will be an organization that people are proud of. To work for, and to work with. Your customers will be your cheerleaders. They love you. Because they feel truly connected to who you are. You make your customers happy and they love you for it. And, they take on that positivity and pass it on. Your organization will be known for taking a stand for what you believe in. To voice your opinion and take on your responsibility. Revenue and profit are not the drivers of your business, but the value you deliver to the world. Not just to your customers, but to society and to all there is. Making the world a better place, today and tomorrow.

## The impact on society

In society we will see how everything comes together as a result of the movement on an individual and business level. The movement on these levels are required to get society in motion. I believe citizens and companies will be the ones pushing the boundaries of the system. Collectively pushing so hard, that at some point the system change, that we all feel needs to happen, will start taking form. Then there will be no stopping the transformation.

The impact we will see is system change. Where one and one becomes three. Where we will experience the synergy of every effort coming together. Changing our way of thinking about ourselves and our role in this world, will lead to changing the way we have organized our system.

Our system is here to support us. To provide the conditions we need to live and work well together. To conserve our wellbeing, to provide a safe place and ensure we have a good tomorrow. We have come to the point where our current system is no longer serving us. It's holding us back from progress. It's limiting our possibilities. Something's got to give and that is our system. It has to go, and it will!

This new way of thinking will lead to different values. Valuing the conservation of our planet higher than the stock prices of listed companies. Making way to tap into our genius and our gifts. Embracing our diversity because it is a true treasure of humanity.

One of the biggest changes that we will see is that we will respect the true value and cost of everything. Including the value or damage to our planet. In the choices we make it's no longer the business case that counts, based on our current economic system, but it's the value case, including environmental and societal value in our decisions. This will be a significant, important, and urgent change. A change that will be respected and sought after because we have started adopting this new way of thinking.

We will see how we reorganize work and education. Currently both highly influenced by Frederick Taylor, who as an engineer applied engineering principles towards work and education. This may have worked when our society – one hundred years ago - had to face the huge scale up of work in factories, but in our modern society, this line of thinking seriously

limits our potential. The strive for performance – and sacrificing people in this strive - is a symptom of Taylorism. We will stop treating people as machines. Education and work will be designed around the talents and gifts of every individual. We will know how to empower people to unlock their potential. Just imagine what will happen if we nurture the imagination and natural curiosity, we had as a kid. If we replace the fear, we start developing (and feeding) when we move towards adulthood with confidence. If we get rid of the higher is better idea in education and work, and respect everyone for who they are. All of this will be happening and more.

We will start to realize that education, work, healthcare, transportation, culture, housing, production, sports, energy, etc, is all connected. Instead of seeing it as different areas with their own problems, we will start to see that the answers are to be found in the connectedness of everything.

This is what we are moving towards as Homo Conexus. Truly connected to ourselves, to others and to all there is. Working with nature instead of against nature. Respecting the planet as our host. Taking our responsibility. Not just for ourselves, but for seven generations to come. Why seven? It's a common way of thinking for Native American People. They believe that impact of every action should be considered for the next seven generations. The seventh generation principle. Pretty smart thinking that we are wise to take on.

Put on your glasses and keep them on forever. You are connected. With yourself, with others and with all there is. You are Homo Conexus and from now on you will see the world in this new light. Making way for a better future just because you can see things differently now.

Every change starts with one person changing. “Be the change you want to see in the world”, said Mahatma Gandhi<sup>30</sup>. He was quite right. But up till now the how was left open. Through this book I have given you the ‘how’. Now you can change. All it requires is to start seeing the world with different eyes. It's that simple.

---

<sup>30</sup> Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869 – 1948) was an Indian lawyer, anti-colonial nationalist and political ethicist who employed nonviolent resistance to lead the successful campaign for India's independence from British rule, and to later inspire movements for civil rights and freedom across the world.

## Afterword

After writing this book I was introduced to the concept of Homo Florens. The beautiful idea of humans as blossoming beings. It was part of a future perspective, looking at the world one hundred years from now. However, as part of this exploration, also came the realization that as long as we are Homo Economicus, there is no room for Homo Florens. Homo Economicus and Homo Florens can not live in the same world.

The Homo Conexus is our being for the land in between. It's the vessel to move away from the performance driven world. The world ruled by economics. As Homo Conexus we can say goodbye to the Homo Economicus move towards a blossoming future. What a promising journey!

I know that our world today may not feel like a place of wonder and possibilities. Climate change is smacking us in the face. We are struggling to get diversity right, and what we have learned in school is becoming to feel irrelevant. Yes... the world is all of this, but it's much more. We have 8 billion people on earth. 8 billion people who can make a difference. 8 billion change agents who can move in a different direction. And you and me ... we are both part of that. Of this huge collective of human beings, who is designing the future together. Just think of the tremendous potential we have, together.

The future is not a path, it's a movement. With every individual, every single person, every step that we take, as valuable as the next. We're a team. You and me and all of us. And as teammates, we are in this together. It's not a matter of choice. It's how it is. We are the movement. Shaping a finer future. Because we have to, and because we can. Together. I've shown you the way, now let's get this movement going. As Homo Conexus, healing the world, together.

## Recommended resources

Authentic Confidence by Jacqueline Brasseley, 2022  
The Book of Hope by Jane Goodall and  
Breath, the New Science of a Lost Art by James Nestor, 2020  
Douglas Ebrams, 2021  
The Choice by Dr Edith Eva Eger, 2018  
Dare to Lead by Brené Brown, 2018  
The Element, how finding your passion changes everything by Ken Robinson, 2010  
Go with Your Talent by Luk Dewulf, 2012  
Anatomy of the Spirit by Caroline Myss, 1996/2017



## Downloads and links

Visit [margotvanbrakel.com/downloads](https://margotvanbrakel.com/downloads) to find downloads and links to useful online resources.