

Boardroom Talent
How Can Executive
Search Do Better?

Executive Search

INTERVIEW
With Eelco van Eijck
By Rino Schreuder



Amrop

Leaders For What's Next

Boardroom Talent

How Can Executive Search Do Better?

Executive search consultants are extremely discreet; their clients and candidates need them to be. For Amrop's Eelco van Eijck, one undesirable consequence is that clients lack a clear view of his profession. And that the sector feels it has insufficient incentive to apply professional and behavioral rules, or develop its quality standard.

With all this in mind, he decided to put his experiences and insights on paper, and to take a position on a number of points that he believes can be improved.

Van Eijck has a wealth of experience — as an executive in international companies (including Procter & Gamble, Reckitt Benckiser, Pepsico, Frito-Lay), and since 2003, as an executive search consultant.

Who does what?

First the jargon: recruitment or recruitment and selection or executive search? Van Eijck: "Recruitment (positions with annual salaries up to approximately € 50,000) and recruitment and selection (up to approximately € 125,000) help people looking for jobs and organizations with vacancies to get together. They play an important role in ensuring that the labor market functions properly.

Executive search (headhunting) helps organizations with heavyweight vacancies (above approximately € 125,000 annual salary) to find people who are not necessarily looking for a different job. They 'are comfortable where they are', and therefore have to be 'detached'. The first two categories work with job seekers, the third with job holders."

That's why Van Eijck is active in the latter sector, at Amrop — one of the worldwide search partnerships. There are also global integrated firms. In addition, there are agencies that operate under their own name in an international network. And, finally, many agencies are active in the niche of one sector or function area.

Cautious estimates talk about 4,000 professional searches per year for the Netherlands (the country where van Eijck lives and works).

Requirements for executives

The trend in the labor market is — not surprisingly — driven by big data, artificial intelligence and algorithm-based search. Van Eijck even starts his new book 'Destination Boardroom' with an analysis of this trend — one he sees especially in recruitment and recruitment and selection. On the other hand, he concludes that in the case of executive search: "the careful search for candidates for top positions requires an interplay between these digital tools and the indispensable use of human skills: observation, association, and all the senses". He agrees with Apple's co-founder Steve Wozniak: "the human brain can associate and combine six different senses; computers and algorithms are not nearly that far yet."



Eelco van Eijck is Managing Partner in Amrop's Amsterdam office and a Member of Amrop's Executive Board. He is an active member of Amrop's global Consumer & Retail Practice and its Life Sciences Practice Groups. Eelco is the Amrop representative at the AESC European Council.

He is the author of 'Bestemming Boardroom' (Destination Boardroom) an exploration of the current status of boardroom talent and the executive search profession.

Eelco holds a Masters Degree in Medicine from Leiden University.

Van Eijck always looks for 11 characteristics among candidates for top positions:

1. **Intelligence:** he distinguishes between adaptability (AQ), business acumen (BQ), cultural intelligence (CQ), emotional intelligence (EQ), and the classic intelligence quotient (IQ)
2. **Passion and drive:** go further/deeper/harder than others in business or private life
3. **Willingness to take risks:** to deliberately step outside the comfort zone
4. **Learning agility:** the development of new ideas, approaches, directions - in stable situations, as well as in new external developments and in unfamiliar situations
5. **Authenticity:** to take a personal course, dare to say 'no', to make clear choices
6. **Create one's own conditions:** by taking the initiative to change and adapt
7. **Self-reflection:** being able to listen, learn from the experience of others, learn from one's own mistakes
8. **Dealing with feedback:** by treating it as an opportunity for improvement and learning
9. **Entrepreneurship:** responding as necessary to changes, seeing opportunities and setting new goals together with others
10. **Result-oriented:** being aware that tangible results must be delivered; set up and complete plans
11. **Empowering others:** strengthening respect and gaining acceptance by letting others score individually and as a team.

And, he adds in the same breath: *perseverance*: "all the other characteristics are worthless if someone doesn't have the determination and resilience to persevere, even when facing adversity or opposition."

New demands on executives

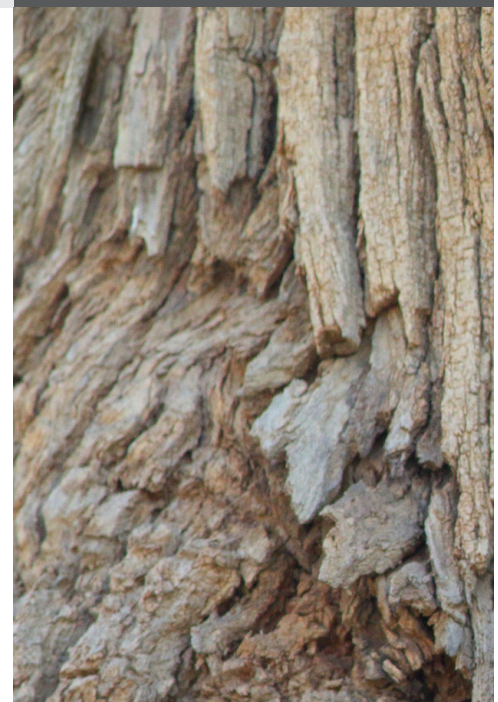
Van Eijck sees enormous changes in the range of duties and responsibilities of the executives he seeks and places: "The classic hierarchical structures are increasingly disappearing; chains and fluid clusters of (temporary) collaborating organizations are arising in which leaders have to meet completely different requirements. Data and information flows — in addition to employees - will become the most important asset of companies. This means that organizations, decision-making processes and product development have to be configured in a very different way."

He agrees with Hans Strikwerda (Dutch organizational theorist, management consultant, and Professor of Business Administration at the University of Amsterdam): "the 'structure' is no longer the primary parameter when designing an organization. Instead, the organization of information and a more balanced decision-making process take place."

These developments make the criteria of Learning Agility, Self-Reflection and Entrepreneurship (above) even more important than they already were.

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Van Eijck formulates 5 new criteria for tomorrow's top manager

1. **Show vulnerability:** make it clear that you do not always have an answer to radical changes: be prepared to answer through trial and error, be open to the input of young experts in new or unexpected areas
2. **Top team:** actively invest in forging a close and authoritative top team
3. **Inspiration:** enthuse employees and teams throughout the organization: stimulate innovation, ask good questions, celebrate successes, radiate passion, set a clear course and keep it steady
4. **Digital DNA:** take extra measures to ensure that you are personally, directly and regularly fed with the latest developments and possibilities. Van Eijck is a proponent of reverse coaching: "ensure you get a regular shot in the arm in the field of social media and digital developments - speak frequently and make sure you are aware of the possibilities and pitfalls."
5. **Touchpoint marketing:** ensure that every moment of contact with a customer contributes to the image that a customer builds up. Make sure everyone is aware that reception staff, telephonists, e-mails, and social media posts are so many contact points, as are public performances by executives, or the relationship with suppliers or distributors.

"These developments", says Van Eijck enthusiastically, "make our work so interesting!"

Criteria for the executive search consultant

Van Eijck places high demands on candidates, but also on his own professional group. He dwells extensively on the requirements that a client may impose on a head hunter, and subsequently on the requirements that the professional group should impose on itself.

"Executive search consultants must — to begin with - know many managers and administrators personally, both because they are potential candidates and because they can be clients." In addition to that network, he sees the need for the following attributes:

- Knowledge of the sector and the company where the vacancy occurs
- Willingness and ability to act as an ambassador for the client
- A level of knowledge and personal experience equivalent to that of clients and candidates
- Social and communication skills
- Managing effective search strategies

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New requirements for executive search consultants

Van Eijck goes one step further, calling on his sector to draw up mandatory professional and behavioral rules. While there is an international code (from the American Association of Executive Search and Leadership Consultants - AESC), these are general guidelines that are not actively enforced. Van Eijck fervently pleads for a binding code, an ombudsman and disciplinary law, as for accountants and lawyers. "That would give clients much more clarity and certainty in advance.

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Also needed is a complaints procedure for when there appears after a search to have been insufficient professionalism or confidentiality, fraud, breach of contract, privacy violation or inadequate aftercare. Measures like these would greatly benefit the professionalism and reliability of our profession.”

He warns of ‘over-regulation’: ‘it’s about freedom within a template’, i.e. demands on the structuring of the process; qualifications, experience and continuous training of executive search consultants; independence; organized confidentiality; a complaints procedure; and for example the financing of the firm.”

Working with a scorecard

To safeguard the quality of his own searches, Van Eijck works with a scorecard. After discussions with all stakeholders and studying the strategy, he defines the search criteria and a job profile. Based on this, in consultation with the client, he compiles the scorecard, containing the criteria that candidates should ideally meet.

The search process then has the familiar phases: research, making contacts, face-to-face conversations, assessment, discussions with the client, checking references, etc.

The scorecard is discussed again when the client has to make a choice between the candidates on the shortlist. Van Eijck: “the scorecard prevents personal preferences, bias towards the most recently-added candidates, or that inappropriate criteria play a role. After all, it happens regularly that a board member arrives at a late stage of the process with a candidate from their own circle. It is usually difficult to say ‘no’ to such a suggestion, but if the executive search consultant has set up the process properly, it can be determined on the basis of the (advance) scorecard, and without much hassle, whether such a candidate meets the criteria.”

Management development

Van Eijck notes with regret that management development officers are often not involved in the search for executives. “That’s unfortunate,” he says, because: “They can make an important contribution to the quality of the search process, mapping the stakeholders, scouting for internal candidates, and the co-creation of the scorecard.”

Van Eijck sees two aspects underlying this: “The Board must of course have an opinion based in management development or strategic HR. Often it’s thought that this can be done at the highest level; that’s a missed opportunity.”

This interview first appeared in the May 2019 issue of MD, a quarterly journal for management development professionals, based in the Netherlands, and has been slightly adapted.

References: *Bestemming Boardroom, over zoeken en gevonden worden*, (Boom, 2018), Strikwerda, prof. J., *Bespiegelingen over governance, bestuur, management en organisatie in de 21ste eeuw*, (Assen, 2014).

A photograph of a screech owl perched on a tree trunk. The owl has brown and grey mottled feathers and large, bright yellow eyes. The tree bark is rough and textured. A red rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing white text.

About Amrop

With over 70 offices in all world regions, Amrop is a trusted advisor in Executive Search, Board and Leadership Services. It is the largest partnership of its kind.

Amrop advises the world's most dynamic organizations on finding and positioning Leaders For What's Next: top talent, adept at working across borders in markets around the world.

Amrop's mission: shaping sustainable success through inspiring leaders.

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