



Photo: Witho Worms

Professor Lorike Hagdorn-Van der Meijden: 'I want to get something off the ground'

Lorike Hagdorn's desk at the TNO office in Delft is rarely occupied. Her role as the leading figure in the theme 'From the Netherlands as distributor to the Netherlands as logistics orchestrator' is mainly played outside the TNO building. She is charged with warming people to new ideas in the field of logistics, mobility and sustainability. One day a week she is professor at the Vrije University (VU) in Amsterdam, looking at chains and networks for transport, distribution and logistics. Today she is in Delft for a change. On her desk next to her computer lies the book *The Black Swan* by the American Lebanese writer Nassim Nicholas Taleb. The book's subtitle is: *the impact of the highly improbable*.

Something for your students perhaps?

'No, this book is lying here ready to be given as

a business gift. If you tend to live in the world of future visions and scenarios, you pretty quickly think that this is how the world will really look. A black swan is a completely unexpected event. Like the impact that occurred after two planes flew into the Twin Towers in New York in 2001 and the banking crisis in 2008. The world then shudders to its foundations. Such events cause a mind shift, a different perspective on things. Taleb describes this very well.'

Have visions, panoramas and networks occupied you for long?

'In that combination, certainly. Since I was eight I grew up in the less fashionable district of Wassenaar. I used to go to the seaside a lot and enjoy the waves, the panoramas and nature. That was the germ that grew into my fascination for a sustainable society. I came into contact

with my first networks during my mathematics studies in Leiden. My father taught maths at high school. I got my maths insight from him but I was most fascinated by the mix of complexity, analysis and creativity. Towards the end of my studies I took a subsidiary subject, Business Administration. My professor, Jo van Nunen, picked me out to be a student assistant and so I remained working there for three years after graduating in 1983. During that time I collaborated on a project for the ANWB (the Dutch Automobile Association) in which mathematics networks played a role. It was a study into the waiting time at roadside emergency phones: how long does it take before you get hold of someone on the other end of the line? Another project was for Schiphol airport. This was at a time that airlines still had their own arrival and departure gates. We investigated

PERSONAL DETAILS

EMPLOYED AS:

Leader of the theme 'From the Netherlands as distributor to the Netherlands as orchestrator', TNO Delft, and building a close relationship between TNO and Rotterdam

BORN ON:

9 April 1960 in The Hague

EDUCATION:

1978-1983: Applied Mathematics at the University of Leiden

PhD:

1989-1996: faculty of Business Administration, Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR); thesis 'Decision Support for Strategic Planning in Logistics'

PREVIOUS JOBS:

include:

1986-1989: consultant/deputy director at AKB consultants, Rotterdam

1989-2006: university senior lecturer, faculty of Business Administration, EUR

2003-2009: partner/associate Boer & Croon Strategy and Management Group, Amsterdam

PROFESSOR:

2007: Transport, Distribution and Logistics; faculty of Economic Science and Business Administration, VU University Amsterdam (1 day a week)

EMPLOYED AT TNO SINCE:

July 2009

MARITAL STATUS:

In March 1987 married Adriaan Hagdorn (52), company lawyer for the Dutch Railways

CHILDREN:

Twins Ties and Ewout (15)

HOBBIES:

Competitive rowing, playing flute, long-distance walking

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'You have to think in terms of logistics networks. A logistics chain shackles your possibilities. Look around you, at your customers' customers and your suppliers' suppliers.'



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Europe. At that time companies like copier and printer manufacturer Rank Xerox were moving from a country by country organisation to European-wide production and distribution. We made a model for this so that all kinds of economic pros and cons could be weighed. Where should you store your stocks? How big should your factories be and how are you going to organise the deliveries among the factories? We did that for the entire chain and later also for companies like Unilever and Shell. We gained an international reputation and I had soon risen to become deputy director. Then the director left and I was asked to take the position. I was just 29 years old and I was not at all keen on having to deal with the company issues of the day – who gets a car phone and who doesn't.'

You quit!

'Yes, and when I left I gave everyone a plastic toy phone. I set up my own company, Hagdorn Management Support and started freelancing. My company is currently dormant. Then I returned to Jo van Nunen and, in addition to my teaching duties, I started on my PhD thesis on the mathematics behind business decision support systems, based on the cases for Rank Xerox, Unilever and Shell. The mathematics felt like blunt blades on smooth ice. I had to go deeper. How detailed must the data-gathering be to be able to make responsible decisions? Not so detailed I reckoned, and I could prove it! I got my doctorate in 1996 and stayed at the Erasmus for another ten years. In 2003 I worked for five years as a partner for the Boer & Croon Strategy and Management Group. In 2007 I started to work as a professor one day a week at the VU.'

How did you come into contact with TNO?

'It happened in 2006 when, as director, I was trying to get the Academic Centre TransPORT in Rotterdam off the ground. This was intended to be the innovation centre for the port of Rotterdam in which knowledge institutes – Erasmus University, TU Delft and TNO – would play a key role in the port's backyard. At the same time I was also involved in setting up a Logistics Top Institute. This happened faster than the centre in Rotterdam so the latter got shelved. The Logistics Top Institute officially opened its doors this April in Breda. TNO is one of the participants. It was during that innovation centre period that I met Lori Tavasszy. He convinced me to join TNO after a couple of conversations. We are now known as the "Lori and Lorike" duo. In both my TNO and professor roles I try to make everyone conscious of the idea that in the logistics field a shift from distribution to

orchestration is necessary in the Netherlands. That, I believe, is where our future lies.'

Orchestrating the international logistics chain?

'Well, I'd rather talk about the logistics network. A chain limits – shackles – your possibilities. You're blinkered, able to just straight ahead and behind but not to the side. Chains, by definition, are linked together. You need to probe those links. Also look at the customers of your customers and the suppliers of your suppliers. We have to make the switch to virtual, logistical, national and international networks. The method is important, of course, but my focus is the development of good cooperation and alliances.' (see page 14)

What are your fears?

'Banks have created a shadow world with all their virtual, hedging products. In fact, the academic world has done the same. Universities compare each other according to scientific top publications and steer their people to achieve this. While I am certainly not against fundamental research and good publications, I too often fail to see the link to reality. So, make sure your research hits the target and doesn't fire wide of the mark.'

If you weren't doing what you do now, what would you have done?

'I would have become an architect. It has the same combination of tasks that I now have: being creative, making something from nothing, getting things off the ground and sustainability.'

whether there could be more flexible gate scheduling for aircraft, which would mean the disappearance of set gates. After all sorts of transitional problems this became such a success that the intended building of a new pier could be delayed by ten years. Schiphol still schedules on the basis of our plan at that time.'

In 1986 you entered the business world.

'A conscious choice, yes. Jo van Nunen felt I should write a PhD thesis but I first wanted to get some business experience and so I started at AKB consultants in Rotterdam, a company of some thirty employees. They were concerned with quantitative modelling and business informatics. We developed route planning software along with Philips, and that's now in your TomTom. Another project concerned opening up internal borders in