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LEADERSHIP SERIES

In this series, we interview leaders whose passion and professionalism contribute to successful, sustainable and responsible business.

HOW CULTURE, MANAGEMENT AND CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY CAN LEAD TO SUCCESS

Interview with
Marijke Kasius
CEO at PQR

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Kicking off the series is Marijke Kasius, CEO of PQR in Utrecht, who puts her heart and soul into making PQR successful in more ways than one.

Who is Marijke and what drives you?

"I am 37 and have completed a series of academic studies: Communication Science, Business Administration and an MBA. I have spent the past ten years working energetically in various management roles within the IT industry. IT is a lot of fun, with that bit of binary - it either works or it doesn't - it's empowering, fast and dynamic. Just to name a few keywords.

But what's really important to me is doing things with passion. What has always played a part throughout my career is that when I create something or build something, I want it to work not only today but also in the long term, and without wasting valuable energy on manual management or adjusting and monitoring processes. I want to take innovative steps for our customers together with colleagues. And above all, I want to keep talking about the things that matter and where we can support them with what they need in the various stages of their growth.

For me, success is not just growth, but is expressed in many more aspects. Being proud of what we achieve together, the commitment of our employees, the company culture and doing all this in the most socially responsible way possible."

To make that possible with the frenetic pace of the day-to-day,, it is necessary to have a culture focused on working together to deliver quality, Kasius believes. As she very decidedly puts it, "Our corporate culture at PQR plays a very important role in this. In order to continuously improve, we must all have a passion for what we want to achieve and also understand why we do it. That includes calling each other to account for things that could be improved and then working together to achieve it. In addition to this culture, we also have to comply with the established processes and structures. That's where certifications like ISO help. ISO is not just a paper exercise, but if you embed it properly within your organization, a lot can be achieved through awareness."

1.

Marijke Kasius - CEO PQR

What exactly is the core business of PQR?

PQR's motto is to be the Peacemaker in IT. At PQR, services are not just about IT. They are about solutions and the people they help, so that the customer can have the peace of mind to work on and grow the business. Three decades of excellence, during which a small hardware reseller grew into a renowned modern IT company with almost 200 employees and a turnover of more than 100 million euros per year.

Marijke explains: "Our starting point at PQR is to manage the entire IT environment, from consulting and management of workstations and networks to hybrid data centers, cloud and security. We support the entire transition to the public cloud and want to provide as much 'as a service' as possible and make our customers more agile by taking the IT tasks off their plate. We do this by talking to the customer about what they need and what the ambition of the organization is. We then translate that into an IT environment that is a perfect fit for their organization, but is also agile enough when their needs change or when the company's strategy shifts.

We developed SpaceHub specifically for that purpose. It is a circle with all possible components that is so flexible that changes are easy to apply. Our 30 years of experience with on-premises IT plus our experience with the cloud comes together here very nicely."

When asked what role Kasius plays in all this, she explains, "I was asked, after a takeover of a managed services party, to organize the entire management part of PQR, to improve the sales cycle and to raise its maturity level. The projects at PQR were bigger than at the managed services party we had taken over, so that had to be properly aligned or we wouldn't have been able to include those customers in the chain."

What is your ambition with PQR? What do you want to achieve?

Kasius: "To become the best Managed Service Provider in the Netherlands. We have just received a nomination that put us in the top 5. That's a great step in the right direction, but we want to be number one. We have to keep developing services, always doing a little more and a little better. We can certainly be proud of this, however, we do have to keep moving with the times." In order to keep abreast of trends in the market, PQR has set up a CTO office, Kasius says. "Internally, the CTO office focuses mainly on the strategy, technical vision, and innovation of the PQR portfolio. Externally, it provides a central platform for customers and suppliers for more interaction and technical visibility in the market. But it also, helps us keep an eye on what is in demand in the market and how we can match that with our services. For our customers, it is impossible to keep up with all these trends and possibilities. Do people need to be trained, how do certifications work, is it easy to implement? We do that by 'best of breed' selection. Our CTO office has the time to continuously research that. Our slogan is, therefore, that PQR creates peace of mind for the customer in the field of IT solutions.

Growth is always an ambition but what we really want above all else is to have a company that we can be proud of and with which we are successful. Having satisfied customers and keeping our identity."

IT in the cloud is said to be greener. How do PQR's services contribute to sustainability? How important is this contribution to PQR?

"In my view, sustainability is always a choice," Kasius says firmly, "whether the cloud is greener or not. You can always opt for greener solutions, and I think we should, especially in the climate challenge we face. We shouldn't close our eyes to that. It's a mindset that starts with being 'open to'. If you embrace that, then you will find that an incredible amount is possible. For example, PQR takes into account the effects that our activities have on the environment.

To ensure this, we implemented a CO2 performance ladder in addition to the ISO 14001 certification. Since 2017, PQR has been certified at the highest rung of that ladder, level 5. The CO2 performance ladder requires an organization to be conscious about limiting its CO2 emissions. For example, we have a lot of hardware that needs to be disposed of. How do you do that? Do you have it dismantled? And how can you do that more sustainably? Can you reuse things?

Sustainability is also a factor in our hiring process, for example. We make a point of hiring people with difficulties in entering the labor market. That is also part of our corporate social responsibility. We also consciously buy sustainably. That can vary from business gifts to the restaurants and event locations that we select. I think it is an important part of our organization. We recently produced an e-book about what you can do as a company to increase CSR.

Whether the cloud really is greener is a difficult question, I think. I believe you have to make your choices as sustainable as possible for the long term. I find it hard to say that one choice is better than the other. On-premises hardware can be given a second life through refurbishment after it has been depreciated. The cloud is also just hardware, but when you house your environment in a cloud provider's data center, you are sharing your infrastructure with countless other organizations. Anything shared can be more sustainable."

How do you see future development in the cloud? What are the trends and innovations that will (positively) change the business of cloud users?

"IT is moving fast, and we don't have a crystal ball. Digital transformation and everything that has to do with that - AI, self-learning - those are developments that will play an increasing role. Where we still do a lot of analysis and solve disruptions ourselves, in the future, there will be more opportunities for systems to do that work for us.

If I look at our monitoring system, which is already coming up with solutions and implementing them on its own, that in turn helps us to support management and resolve disruptions even before they occur. These are big steps, and you can see that it all started slowly and now it's happening so much faster.

The possibilities of the cloud also really contribute to this. Just think of scaling capacity up and down. At the moment, it is still a matter of setting up the cloud to switch off resources at night if they are not being used. Soon that will just happen automatically.

Another example is the storage of your resources. If you want, you can let the cloud decide how your data is stored in whatever way is cheaper, for example. Then it does the migration – a migration that used to be complicated, but now it's done automatically. And at some point, we won't even be able to imagine that we ever did that by hand.

Developments are moving very quickly and AI is really going to take off."

4.

Which roles besides IT does PQR interact with and to what extent does this change the conversation you have with customers?

"Information technology is no longer just the domain of IT specialists. What I like about that is that you can reach a lot more people and you can bring other roles in organizations into the conversation. At first, it was mostly IT talking to IT, but now you're talking to people at different levels and in different disciplines that all intersect with IT, for which you can again provide a solution. Think of data analysis or administrative processes that you can organize. There are now other points where we enter the conversation and not just through IT. That now comes later.

There is a lot of talk about the digital maturity of companies. How would you rate the digital maturity of Dutch companies?

"I think it's hugely underestimated, how vulnerable we are in the Netherlands to cybercrime. Of course, there are plenty of companies that have things well organized. But there are also so many companies who, for example, want to 'ride out' their current IT environment before they take the step of investing again. The risk of becoming a victim of cybercrime is much higher when you are working in an older IT environment. Moreover, that risk is growing by the day. Digital maturity is moving in the right direction, though. We are a prosperous country, so we are in a position to do those kinds of projects, but it definitely needs to be improved," says Kasius.

For more information about PQR and CEO Marijke Kasius, please visit www.pqr.com

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