

With head, heart and hand in balance

A Knowmad can work everywhere!

Interview with Pieter Spinder, Founder of the international Knowmads Business School Amsterdam



Six years ago Pieter Spinder founded the extraordinary international “Knowmads Business School Amsterdam” with the goal of educating tomorrow’s international change makers today. Contrary to traditional governmental business schools, the education is focused on the person himself/herself, his/her competencies as well as his/her wishes how to work and live as well as the interaction in groups and practice-oriented projects. There is no fixed curriculum. About 20 students are nowadays studying and working at the exclusive institute. Since the beginning, about 130 Knowmads from 24 different countries have been trained and are now working in businesses and startups. Recently, a new Knowmads Business School branch has even been opened in Hanoi – Vietnam.

IM+io Mr. Spinder, you founded the Knowmads Business School in Amsterdam about six years ago. One goal was to educate leaders and founders from all over the world, who are independent and able to question the world in order to reach innovative ideas, contrary to the governmental education system. Which results would you like to point out so far?

PS: There is no explicit answer to this question. As we invite people to a personal journey in a tribe setting (open study groups), every individual goes through different processes and situations. The framework of Knowmads business school (loose set of study regulations) is focused on personal development and Changemaking – entrepreneurial behavior, based on personal values and passions that every individual discovers during the program. As the setting and the content of the program is based on who is in the program, we can support and facilitate this personal journey. There is no “fixed” program unlike the governmental education system. We offer the possibility to develop, discover and do the things, the individual feels like doing.

Around their demands and needs we develop a program, which consists of 30 full day workshops dealing with the topics „personal leadership“ and „entrepreneurship“. As a result, we have 130 alumni from 24 different countries who now know their needs, wants and demands and are acting upon that. There are alumni who continued studying, some others started

businesses. During the 6 years of the Knowmads Business School around 75 projects or companies were started. We facilitated journeys that were not about thinking what to do, but to try out and discover in real life what is important for the individual in a bigger setting and for them to be able to make a living from that.

IM+io How do you define „Knowmad“? What is the difference between a Knowmad from your institution and a conventional founder or manager controlling the companies today?

PS: A Knowmad is someone who can work everywhere, with anyone, based on his/her core and inner values and has his/her inner self as a starting point to develop. Based on that there is a better self-perception as well as a better connection with the environment where he or she lives and works in. Thereby, the most important thing

About 130 Knowmads from 24 different countries were trained in the Knowmads Business School and are now working in businesses and startups.

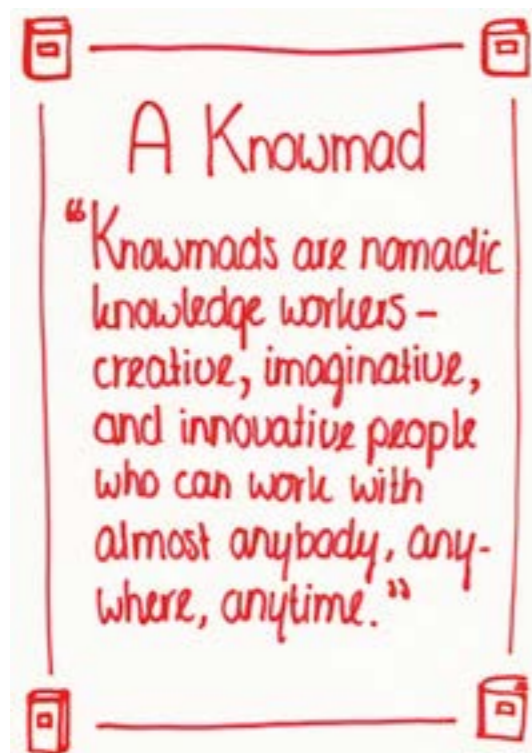
Digital Leadership is managing with head (cognition), heart (feeling) and hands (action).

is, that people come first along with the environment or context they are living and working in, and that life is not (only) led by growth, money, competition, prestige or plain numbers. We are discovering, that just growing bigger and bigger and generating more and more does not work in the world of today.

IM+io The Knowmads Business School has a clear international focus. Do you see any cultural characteristics for specific countries or regions?

PS: According to our open concept, we mostly see similarities of young people who want to change the world regardless of their origin.

IM+io Talking about digital business models, the scalability of digital business models can be seen as one key differentiator. But platforms like Airbnb or Uber do not own resources as hotels or cars. Therefore the digital



leader cannot control those resources with traditional management instruments. Is this the home territory of the Knowmads? How can you learn this new type of leadership?

PS: Control is not about defining a "new" leader. If people are afraid to lose control, they are mostly trying to build and create new structures to keep or get even more control. But, the difference is that they did not have any control in the first place! In 2008 Airbnb was used about 6.000 times, but by the last Christmas holidays over 2 million people used Airbnb. By facilitating personal development and having a helpful open framework, it is possible to gather as many meaningful experiences as possible. To learn this "management" style you have to trust yourself first, go into practice, shape and reshape a service or product and try out again. Keep on thinking, designing and changing. To stop managing or to allow failing (we do not use that word often) enables you to experience what works and what does not. It is the daily collected information, on which you can build your knowledge upon to get wiser and wiser during the entire journey. So we say, Digital Leadership is managing with head (cognition), heart (feeling) and hands (action) in an even and balanced way.

IM+io Can you learn Digital Leadership or Entrepreneurship in a school? Don't you need practice, conflicts and borderline experiences to create a disruptive manager?

PS: Yes. You can learn digital leadership but you have to practice it in real life. At Knowmads we stimulate and initiate real life projects with companies or internally. This leads to conflicts and borderline experiences as well – but in a safe environment to create real life learning.

IM+io How to measure knowledge work is also a huge question talking about Knowmads. New methods like performance analytics, brought up by the digitization, are used to measure knowledge, but how do you measure your trainees' learning successes like visionary force, inspiration or risk tolerance?

PS: Measurement is not the most important thing at Knowmads Business School. We believe in lived through experience. Also knowledge is something which is freely available on the internet – all the big universities nowadays offer

free or almost free courses online. Plus new platforms like Udemy and others are coming up to provide free knowledge – so it will be all about how and where to find reliable data and knowledge.

IM+io The Knowmads Business School has brought up about 130 graduates from many different countries since its foundation. Have your pioneers founded successful enterprises?

PS: Yes, you may have heard of companies like wickedgrounds, Biteme.nl, LogicLocks.nl, overthemoon.nl or vudinh.nl. You can check out more at Knowmads-stories^[1].

IM+io Companies or enterprises in Europe are often dominated by centralized, hierarchical or even authoritarian structures. How does the Changemaker from the Knowmads Business School succeed in this work environment?

PS: The Changemaker of tomorrow has to create a safe space for him/herself and the environment s/he is working in. According to that, s/he always has to listen to his/her inner voice and the feeling in his/her guts. We already have alumni creating these spaces successfully at Volkswagen Innovation, ABNAMRO, Bol.com and many more SMEs.

IM+io The governmental education system is pretending to change and to transform, so they will be able to adapt the needs of knowledge and digital society in future. Also, companies are in transformation. Both, state and companies, want to prepare their leaders and structures for the digital economy. Many companies establish innovation labs, transformation and open innovation hubs or are using swarm intelligence in their corporate culture. Do you see positive changes in the governmental education system as well as in certain companies to create the needed leaders for the knowledge society?

PS: Yes, a lot of good stuff is happening in regular education and also Knowmads Business School is facilitating many change programs in universities all over the world as e.g. the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Colombia, Argentina or Denmark. The challenge is to provide the willingness to start with a blank sheet of paper, not just to adjust little by little or to put new tools in the curriculum.

Starting all over from scratch, in an open framework as the Knowmads Business School and then seeing what emerges is the real challenge.

IM+io One of the characteristics of digital Knowmads is the specific way of working which is strongly influenced by digital technologies. What digital technologies do you use ...?

PS: We are using mostly Google, Slack, Evernote, Dropbox, Harvest, Facebook, Instagram and many more. The usage of these technologies must be natural to the Knowmads.

IM+io Do you see Knowmads as good consultants? Will Knowmads be changing the consulting business?

PS: Yes, and as we are linked with www.people-rise.net (a consultancy firm in Italy). We also invite Knowmads Alumni to join us in facilitating the projects, which we are doing internationally with corporate clients. Their input is crucial for the attendees of the workshops as they give a different and fresh insight in corporate matters.

IM+io Considering the German point of view, we have to talk about the Social Security matters. Do Knowmads have pension insurances? Is job security or other security schemes important to Knowmads?

PS: They need to arrange this for themselves, like every (social) entrepreneur has to.

IM+io Do you see yourself as Knowmad?

PS: Yes I do, as some of my projects and movies have stated.

Thank you for this interview.



Pieter Spinder

Pieter Spinder is an entrepreneur whose interest has moved to alternative education throughout the years. Pieter Spinder sparked Knowmads Business School into existence together with a nine-headed team of ex-students and facilitators. He is also the coordinator and facilitator of the program 'Sustainable Leadership and Entrepreneurship' and of the Knowmadic Entrepreneurship Honors Program at the University of Applied Sciences in Amsterdam.

Kontakt

spinder@knowmads.nl
Tel.: +31 6 814 90 700
www.knowmads.nl



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