

# Key note speech

## By Joep Aerts, Group ICT & Projects Director, Den Hartogh Logistics

Dear all,

It is a privilege to be here. It is great to be surrounded by so much talent, to be surrounded by so many future plans and dreams, so Bart, thank you for your invitation.

Bart invited me with the following words. It was in Dutch but a short translation is as follows. During this poster session we would like to have a professional with a career in the Port of Rotterdam to give a speech about the added value of a PhD for such a career. And as you are the only manager in this area I know with a PhD I send this request to you. I think that puts me in a unique position, at least in the eyes of Bart, so again thank you.

However, the question what the added value of a PhD is, cannot be answered by me. The only thing I can do is give you my vision on this question.

Thinking about added value of a PhD the first question that needs an answer is “What is the definition of value?” Is value the height of your salary, or the size of your company car? Or is value the impact you generate in your company, or even the impact in the society, or even further is value the ability to follow your dreams and live a joyful life.

First I have to be very honest with all of you, the direct impact of a PhD degree on your salary and on the size of your company car is not that big. On the other hand I have a strong believe that the extra value a PhD can bring is very large. And I say that for three reasons.

Firstly, the industry, and maybe even more the port industry is mostly runned and controlled by very operational professionals. A large percentage of managers in our industry obtained their position by excelling in operational roles. The honesty in the invitation of Bart underlines this. Whereas the ability to combine strong operational thinking with future strategic thinking can bring a crucial difference between failure and success for a company. And this combination requires a certain abstraction level. If you as a PhD are able to use the academic background to add this abstraction level to the operational excellence in a company, there are really opportunities to excel, to create large impact in an organisation and thereby make fast progress in your career.

Secondly, for every company a certain level of innovation is important. Whether it is the implementation of new technologies, the adaptation of business processes, or the introduction of new products,

companies need to innovate to survive in the ever-changing world. And these days, these changes and business cycles seem to go faster and faster. The creativity that is needed to do research on the highest level is also required to bring innovation in the companies. And what I think is very important to stress here, is that innovation is not only having a good idea. The difference is made by the people who bring the ideas to reality. So the question that was asked to you to think about the possible implementations of your ideas in businesses is highly relevant for these businesses.

Thirdly, and maybe the most valuable is the idea of self-awareness. Working towards the result of obtaining your PhD requires a lot of motivation. It is not an easy job, it requires a lot of self-motivation, in fact it is a journey in which you learn a lot. In my opinion, spending three to four years on one specific subject gives you an excellent opportunity not only to learn everything about the subject, but also to learn a lot about yourself. The process of obtaining a PhD is an ideal process to make large steps in self-awareness, especially compared to a normal business career, where the energy is made by short-term goals and where the next goal pops up before you reached the current one.

Why do I consider self-awareness as a high value? First of all, it is common knowledge in management research that self-awareness is a critical factor in reaching leadership. Leaders can be extraverts and introverts, can be risk avoiding or thrill seeking, but in general, they all score high on self-awareness and self-motivation. Secondly, for your personal growth, it is valuable to know your strengths and weaknesses and to be able to motivate and improve yourself. The only path to excellence is to improve your strengths. Knowing what your skills are and how you can use these skills in the organisation you work for is very important. By growing on a daily basis and using all your experiences for future performance you can increase the impact that you make on an organisation, and even more important increase the fun you have in your job.

So to conclude, I do believe that doing a PhD can bring a lot of value for your future career, but the only person who has the key to that success, is you!