

A close-up portrait of Paul Hesselink, a middle-aged man with grey hair, smiling warmly. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a light blue striped shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green and yellow, suggesting an outdoor setting.

redswan
PARTNERS

Paul Hesselink
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SUCCESSFUL LEADERS

IN THE TIC INDUSTRY

Paul Hesselink

CORPORATE STRATEGY
KIWA N.V.

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND HOW YOU GOT STARTED IN THE TIC SECTOR?

I graduated as a research scientist in Biochemistry with a PhD in Biotechnology and after my four years of academic research, I joined the Dutch contract research organization TNO. There I helped develop all kinds of bioprocesses for food, pharma, chemicals production, recycling and environmental decontamination by applying enzymes and microorganisms instead of chemical and physical processes.

After a while, I realized that I was managing projects and departments more than working at the lab bench myself. So when tapped on the shoulder, I wanted to find out more and became a managing director in the OGC sector within SGS, my first encounter of TIC. After climbing the ranks, I developed into a 'growth driven manager' - and was always looking to develop new services and expand 'my companies'.

In 2003, Kiwa offered me the opportunity to do that as CEO - to change its culture and diversify its activities. That turned out to be a very good career move and I enjoyed it until I stepped back in late 2023. In that time Kiwa had grown from around 175 staff in one country to over 11,000 staff in 40 countries. An intense but very rewarding trip of two decades!



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CAN YOU SHARE WITH US A SPECIFIC PROJECT OR ACCOMPLISHMENT THAT YOU ARE PARTICULARLY PROUD OF AND WHY?

In fact, my journey with Kiwa was the ultimate project. I thrived during my 20 years there, in a constantly expanding and changing company. We had to adjust the structure and processes frequently while retaining momentum, keep spirit and human touch high within a decentralized culture, and have local experts driving the business. Through this, we were able to turn Kiwa in 2003 from the reactive semi-public institute into the go-getting international TIC service provider you see today, with its relevance to an international clientele on a global scale.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BIGGEST FACTOR AFFECTING THE TIC INDUSTRY AT THE MOMENT?

Well, the hottest topics at present are ESG / CSRD, digitization and cyber security challenges, both to the TIC companies themselves and even more so to our customers and societies. At this moment, there are hardly any clear standards nor procedures to live up to. In this semi-chaotic environment, a TIC company must make the right choices for its own rules as well as for services to customers that are really relevant.



CAN YOU SPEAK OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU HAVE FACED IN YOUR CAREER AND HOW YOU OVERCAME THEM?

Kiwa being a technical professionals' organization in nature (and myself being a scientific researcher for over a decade), we had to learn the objectives, language and operating model of private equity and the financial industry. It was quite different from the TIC knowledge we had, but the alignment worked well, and to some extent the alignment was made easier by allowing all Kiwa managers and employees to purchase shares in the developing Kiwa company as a buy-in. Sharing success makes things easy.

WHAT IS YOUR APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP AND TEAM MANAGEMENT?

"Decentralized works best in professional services" is my mantra based on my own experience from when I was younger. It certainly applies in TIC, which requires a high level of expertise from individuals. Most employees know very well how something should be done properly and efficiently. Setting strategy with senior colleagues and having buy-ins from those who matter is another important aspect.



HOW DO YOU PRIORITIZE AND MANAGE YOUR WORKLOAD TO ENSURE SUCCESS?

By 'keeping it simple' as a guiding principle and checking a very few indicators only to assess progress. Be clear on priorities and KPIs and don't have too many at the same moment. Then, one can handle quite a lot in a short period and stay collected.

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HOW DO YOU SPEND TIME OUTSIDE OF WORK?

Running and hiking, reading and travelling history. Incidentally, making loud music. And since we bought an old farmhouse: rebuilding and repairing things myself (clumsily).

IN 3 WORDS ONLY - WHAT IS THE SECRET TO YOUR SUCCESS?

Something like

'TARGETED FRIENDLY PERSISTENCE'