

Increasing International Workplacements;
improving local spots towards a high standard
networkapproach

Geerd Voortman; KennisPartner || SEPTEMBER 2007



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Research within the Hansepassageprogramme, the project Hanze Mobility Network. This research is initiated by Provinces Groningen and Drenthe.

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ABSTRACT

The question in this study is how a fit between international students (and educational institutions) and SME's can be better arranged. Key elements are findability and matching. In this survey SME's in the North of The Netherlands are questioned about their views on international students and workplacements.

The conclusion is that at local level the practice of matching students has some shortage. The institutions are sometimes islands, there is little reciprocal contact between coaches. And entrepreneurs sometimes do not know where to ask for a student. Therefore one office can contribute towards a more customer-directed way of thinking and acting. In the matching process a knowledgebroker can help firms defining assignments. International cooperations are bright, but start at well functioning local practices. When this local processes are in control, these local spots can be bind together.

PREFACE

Within the programme Hansepassageprogramme, the project Hanze Mobility Network is initiated. This project focuses on the exchange of students of either higher education or university in the North-European regions. One of the results of this project is the contact database¹ in which student and company can meet. This is started to increase transparency of supply of work placements.

The partners in this project are located in the North of the Netherlands:

Provinces Groningen and Drenthe, on their invitation: Hanzehogeschool Groningen, Hogeschool Drenthe, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen and Chamber of Commerce. They discussed this matter and together they formulated the following research question:

What is the best way to improve the match between student and SME's and therefore increase the number of work placements of students with profit organisations?

KennisPartner has given the assignment to research the possibilities for a student and a company to get in touch and therefore increase international mobility. In this survey is postulated that there are more work placements than companies offer².

This study aims at describing both demand side(students/educational institutions) as supply side(companies).

Firstly we will look at the concepts already existing for the purpose of bringing student and company together. There have been several interviews with workplacement coaches of different educational institutions.

Concerning the demand side, there have been interviews with firms located in the North of The Netherlands which have international contacts and therefore maybe interested in an international student.

The survey focuses on the North-Dutch market. It is clear that this research is done within the international context of the Hansepassageprogramme. In the conclusions we will look at the findings of every region. It will show that this international cooperation is positive in relation to the international workplacementbank

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1 database available at <http://hamonet.zmml.uni-bremen.de/>

2 via www.colo.nl, www.kansopstage.nl

RESEARCH DESIGN

The central idea within HaMoNet is the force of the network. To this background this survey has been formulated. The HaMoNet questioned in which way the international contacts could be used more efficiently. Therefore KennisPartner became a research with the following **purpose**:

More international workplacements within the North-Dutch economic life

The **value** for the region will be summarized as:

- Reinforce knowledge exchange and improve mutual relationships with Higher Education and companies,
- Improve international position of the North-Dutch educational system and economic life.
- Increase of knowledge around entrepreneurship by students of Higher Education.

The **main question** for this survey is the following:

What are the possibilities to improve the match between student and SME's and therefore increase the number of workplacements of students with profit organisations?

Respondents

In order to investigate the problems is chosen to look at the demand side as well as the supply side of the workplacements. At the demand side conversations were held with workplacement coaches.

At the supply side interviews were held with companies. Because of the international contacts this survey has chosen to interview firms who take part in export or import of products or services.

As interviewed population we have chosen for companies that have contacts with Poland, which is represented by three regions. This population is a good cross section of the cooperating branches.

Premises for the survey was that the international exchange by itself does not have to be made more attractive.

Considering a situation in which supply and demand of workplacements do not match we deal with two thematic insets: *findability* and *matching*:

Findability refers to the quality of being locatable;

Matching is about adjusting supply and demand.

In order to reduce the difference between supply and demand it is important that the involved parties know about each other. Therefore it is important to look at the role findability has in the matter:

- Which channels are there to make a connection between student and company?
- Which possibilities are created by existing databases?
- In which frequency is the potential of these existing database used for exchange of students?

The second aspect is *matching*. When supply and demand meet it is important to look at the most efficient way to match them.

The following questions are asked:

- In which way are intermediaries used?
- Are there differences between educational institutions and companies that will obstruct the cooperation

Next to that we will consider the *preconditional aspects*. An example could be: what are the requirements that companies and educational institutions have for students.

Finally this chapter will recommend strategies to improve findability and matching.

Researchmethods

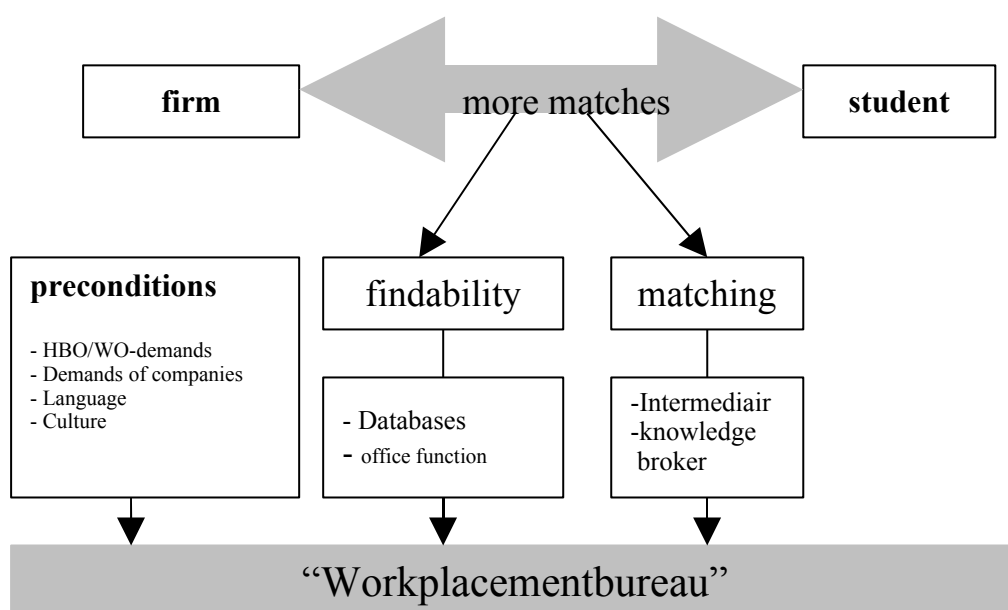
The data for this project are collected in three ways:

1. Desk research (existing facilities)
2. Conversations with partners, workplacement coaches, AIESEC and Chamber of Commerce.
3. Interviews with companies

The interviews are taken orally as well as by telephone. You can find the questionnaire in the appendix. The number of interviewed companies is 50.

Conceptual Researchmodel

The conceptual researchmodel exists from conversations with persons in the field. The purpose of the research is to find out in which way it is possible to increase the amount of matches between student and company. The question was how to design a system in which findability and matching are present. Eventually this result will result in buildingblocks for a intern workplacement bureau.



1 WHAT ARE THE REASONS TO EMPLOY AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT?

For the last decade internationalisation is a hot topic, especially in the field of educational institutions. The more society becomes international (global economy and labour markets), the more international knowledge and skills become essential. By means of exchange programs and international internships, educational institutions define this in a concrete matter. Regardless the benefits an international internship have for the students, the admittance of highly educated international students means an inflow of knowledge capital for the district. This capital has a radiation-effect on other people and enterprises who can learn from these people. Although these effects are mostly local³, physical closeness, as it is in case of international internships, is important to get optimal benefit of someone's knowledge.

The Dutch government likely invites gifted foreigners as an addition to the national economy and provides in several approvals making it easier for international students to come to The Netherlands. Because of deregulation for entrepreneurs it is also easier to get an international student now.

At corporate level, an international student can add great value. With help of an international workplacement trainee SME's can explore new markets, intensify or extend international relations, or give a more international dimension to the firm.

According to the organisation *Leonardo da Vinci*⁴ The Netherlands are attractive for international students because of its central position. Besides Dutch firms are relatively open-minded and the people are used to deal with foreigners (multicultural society). The disadvantage is that their stay is too short to learn the language.

Despite the described advantages, the majority of Dutch firms are not familiar with international students (84%). Furthermore most enterprises don't want an international student at all.⁵

Also AIESEC⁶ confirms that most company's aren't in search of international students. Especially in the North of The Netherlands it's very hard to get firms willing an international student. The SME's are relatively small and (less time and money to guide the students) most of them don't see the advantages of international internships. Last year 14 internships are formed in the North, whilst 50 students are sent away. At national level, most

3 Cornet, M., F. Huizinga, B. Minne en D. Webbink, 2006, Kansrijk kennisbeleid, Centraal Planbureau, CPB document 124, Den Haag

4 Leonardo da Vinci is the European Community's vocational training programme

5 Most firms in this study are international focussed, that may be part of the explanation

6 Internationaal netwerk of over 90 countries; AIESEC runs an exchange program that enables over 4,000 students and recent graduates the opportunity to live and work in another country.

internships are situated in the vicinity of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, the economical centre. The North isn't very attractive.

The interviewed entrepreneurs in this survey are not very familiar with the international student: just 10% provided an international internship. Mostly on the initiative of AIESEC or an educational institution (demand side).

The questioned internship coaches who advocate the international internships, draw attention to the entrepreneurial behaviour and the independence which is typical for international students.

Companies who have experienced international internships praise the fresh look these people bring into the firm.

2 COMPANYSIDE

SME's are questioned about their preferences about students and international students. A clear view is distilled. 78% of questioned enterprises is familiar with internships. Only 10% of the firms have dealt with international students.

Preconditions

Firms look for students who are be able to work on their own, and who are sufficient educated for the assignment: both skills and knowledge. Students are first invited for an acquaintance, to see if they are capable for the assignment.

The requirement for international students is speaking English fluently. This is always the case, and causes no problem, according to questioned firms.

In interviews, the placementcoaches pay attention to some bad experiences companies have had with international students and their culturedifferences. Although the questioned entrepreneurs did not share this view. The companies who had an international student are very satisfied with their contribution to the firm and do not see any culturedifferences they can not deal with.

The Hogeschool Drenthe used to organize a cultureworkshop for firms who invited an international student. The questioned firms see this as an interesting option, but not as a necessity.

Findability

20% of questioned enterprises find it hard to get a student for an existing assignment / workplacement. Just 4% uses workplacements as a HRM-tool to get new personnel. In 16% of questioned firms students got a job there after their workplacement.

There is not just one way to get students for a workplacement: both at the initiative of students and firms workplacements are created. In most cases it is at the initiative of the demandside (students/schools) 74%. 14% of the companies that are familiar with workplacements are willing to choose for the same college if possible. Companies are also frequently asked for workplacements if they have had students in the past (students use the school's database). Online workplacement-tools are not often used (4%).

3 EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONSIDE

The Educational System in The Netherlands

Most children start primary school at the age of four, although they are not required by law to attend school until the age of five. On leaving primary school at the age of about 12 (after eight years of primary schooling) children choose between three types of secondary education: VMBO (pre-vocational secondary education; four years), HAVO (senior general secondary education: five years) and VWO (pre-university education: six years).

After HAVO or VWO the students go to HBO or WO. The higher education system in the Netherlands is based on a three-cycle degree system, consisting of a bachelor, master and PhD degree. The three-cycle system was officially introduced in the Netherlands at the beginning of the academic year 2002-2003. The Netherlands has a binary system of higher education, which means there are two types of programmes: research orientated education (wetenschappelijk onderwijs, WO), traditionally offered by research universities, and applied sciences (hoger beroepsonderwijs, HBO), traditionally offered by hogescholen, or universities of applied sciences. In both types of programmes students have to make an assignment or attend a workplacement .

Conditions educational institution

The length of a workplacement traject varies from seven weeks to half a year. The student has two tutors: one from inside the company and one from the school. The enterprisetutor is important and must have sufficient educational level to give feedback

The assignment must cover the level of education. Students have to put into practise their skills and knowledge. Requirements are that the student has sufficient input and responsibility in the process.

4 WHAT ARE THE POSSIBILITY'S TO BRING SME'S AND STUDENTS TOGETHER?

Workplacementsites

There are a lot of workplacementsites where firms and students can meet. A well functioning site has its excellent system side , but there are other important factors. Good contacts with entrepreneurs and educational institutions are very important. The majority of the interviewed people emphasized that this personal contact is essential to win mutual respect.

Especially with international workplacements this aspect plays a huge role. Little workplacementwebsites are a cooperative initiative of education and economic life, while that is an excellent way to adjust demand and supply⁷.

As written more thoroughly further on, economic life and knowledge centres do not speak the same language and therefore do not understand each other.

Organisations

Next to the online workplacementsites there are also organisations acting as mediator. See for example AIESEC who's providing an extending service to international students. AIESEC gives a network of support that can guide and encourage students towards their vision and goals. Through conferences, learning networks, innovative on-line platforms, and a growing alumni network, AIESEC provides young people with the opportunity to create a strong and global network to support them in their personal and professional pursuits.

Selection and Application – after joining and understanding AIESEC students can enter a review process to assess their experiences and motivation for doing an AIESEC exchange.

Preparation – AIESEC provides resources, training and support to prepare students to live and work in another country.

Matching - Students will be trained and given access to use the online database of jobs, with help of coaches.

Integration – AIESEC members in the host chapter provide support and assistance in getting setup while providing opportunities for cultural and social activities

Companies are asked for workplacements. If they like to, they can create an assignment with the help of coaches put it in the database. AIESEC provides a short list of suitable candidates and aids the selection process by arranging a telephone or online interviews. Companies pay for this service an additional 1400 Euro.

Advertisement

7 Stageproblematiek in Oost Nederland? Visser,B.A., 2006

Firms send an assignment to the workplacementcoach and there it is put on the notice board or send by email to the students

Via educational institutions

Most educational institutions have workplacementdesks. Students can ask for addresses. Sometimes the coaches go into the field of SME's to acquire assignments. Especially in case of international workplacements in Asia the network function is very important.

Walk in

Students use their own network sometimes.

Exchanges

The Chamber of Commerce initiates the Day of Workplacements. It is an opportunity to inform students and SME's about practical aspects considering workplacements. Furthermore students can apply for workplacements.

Databases

Besides the online workplacementsites, the HaMoNet database and the trade register of the Chamber of Commerce can be used.

The HaMoNet-tool is a contactdatabase for higher education institutions, vocational schools, chambers of commerce, SME's and larger companies that contains contact data of placement officers, stakeholders, technology transfer points, companies and study coordinators who are aiming at deepening their international relations.

The objective of the HaMoNet database is to facilitate the networking within and amongst the HansePassage regions by bringing together (higher) educational institutions with stakeholders from industry and public authorities. It offers valuable contact information available through participation in the network. Additional value is the opportunity to further co-operate with network partners in the frame of regional, national and European funding programmes. Besides this information the HaMoNet database does not provide in workplacements.

In The Netherlands registration in the trade register is compulsory for almost every company.

The trade register records the actual activities of a company. This provides actors with a valuable source of information. You can use this information for market research, for example, or for academic research or for a specialized mail campaign aimed at a particular

target group. The trade register also provides information about the size of the company, i.e. the number of persons who are employed for an average of at least 15 hours a week.

You will find the addresses of almost all Dutch companies and legal entities in the trade register (BVs, associations, foundations, etc.). Beside the addresses you will find information about branches and possible import and export partners.

Students can use this information to see if they can apply for an assignment by a partner abroad. It is in the advantage of students that contacts are possibly more confident.

It is not common for students to use the trade register in this way. A continuous online connection is not possible, the data is not for free.

5 DO'S AND DON'TS

In this part is described how matching of demand and supply of knowledge transfer is obstructed by differences in culture, language and way of thinking.

Recent studies show⁸ that educational institutions are not familiar with the way of life in SME's. Communication and knowledge transfer could be improved by creating a sharper image of the knowledge needs of entrepreneurs. It is stated that educational institutions do not understand the (economic) way of thinking of little firms. It is caused by cultural differences. Otherwise, entrepreneurs sometimes hesitate to ask for advice.

There is a difference in language and level of intellectual ability that hinders the communication. Entrepreneurs verified this statement in the interviews.

The lack of customer directed thinking is obvious: when entrepreneurs enter the educational institution, they sometimes are referred numerous times. A hesitating customer is soon lost.

Therefore they advocate one desk for all workplacement assignments and knowledge questions.

Intermediar / knowledgebroker

The Hogeschool Drenthe uses a knowledgebroker. This person can introduce entrepreneurs with knowledge questions to the correct person in the educational institution.

Entrepreneurs than know where to go with certain questions. From research, mentioned before, appears that firms often do not know what they need or what will be in their advantage. Within the Hogeschool Drenthe this was a reason to start actively looking for companies. The advantage of actively looking for workplacements is that more SME's know about the possibilities of educational institutions.

It often appears that entrepreneurs notice a failure in management. However, changing the situation is difficult because there is a lack of knowledge or ability. It appeared from several conversations that companies would like to exchange experiences about failure with someone from an educational institute.

Before the assignment is formulated a lot of decisions are already taken. For example: what type of research will be done etc.

8 Wie Weet, Die Innoveert, Business Development en Knowledge Management, Faculty for Management and Organisation, State University Groningen, 2006

By using intermediaries this empty space can be filled. However in real life this a knowledgebroker is not used very often. The expectation is that there are a lot of potential assignments provided by SME that could be discovered by using a knowledgebroker.

AIESEC also matches student and company by using an intermediary. Firstly, an AIESEC employer and the workplacement company use the survey question to create a workplacement. Secondly the workplacement is put in a database. The supplyside will be coached too. A student and an AIESEC-coach will search the database for a suitable workplacement. After that the coach will contact the workplacement coordinator.

This will bring together knowledgesupply and knowledgesupply, students and workplacements. This should not be done from a massive database which is impersonal, but from a regioncentered database. This will make the searching process more personal and will increase the success. The elaborated version of this plan is written in the last chapter.

A confining factor is that the short-term questions from the SME are not easy to solve right away. Teachers want this, but the plans of a educational system and the SME are not the same. An SME entrepreneur want help right away, when teachers work from a different system. They work with attempt obligation and not with result obligation like SME. This is a lesson SME will have to learn in order to get a good cooperation.

Another cultural aspect that has its influence on matching is between company and student. From several interview it became clear that companies have problems with Asian students. Cultural differences can cause mutual incomprehension.⁹, which is a risk for the success of the match. This is the reason for organising cultural workshops to help students and companies to understand each other.

Intern communication / organisation

The educational institute can benefit from good matching and findability. From several conversation it became clear that a lot of employers do not know enough about the contacts their company/institute has with educational institutes and economic life.

It has occurred that one organisation invents the same thing over and over again. Next to that most of the knowledge stays in the brain of the employer. When this person is transferred to another department all this knowledge is lost.

It could be useful for stability and continuity of the contact between companies and educational systems to process this information in order to keep it within the organisation.

Most of the times the only thing that happens is exchanging business cards, so the rest of the well build network is lost.

⁹ Dit beeld wordt niet gedeeld door ondervraagde ondernemers

This is the reason for educational institutes that initiatives like HaMoNet are useful. Next to that there is another important side effect of bringing these groups together. The information that is shared during these meetings will increase the level of mutual understanding towards workplacements. Besides this network-function HaMoNet has also caused a more international way of thinking amongst its partners.

Another aspect that has to do with findability are office problems. Entrepreneurs often do not know where to go with a certain assignment, there is no central point. The thought of one bureau which will increase the service for all employers seems justified. A bureau is easy accessible and therefore companies will use them more often. Demand and supply will be adjusted better.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The focus of this research was to increase the amount of international work placements in the North of The Netherlands through the aspects of findability and matching. The inset was that internationalizing starts with creating order in your information system. Therefore the local database was thoroughly studied in order to see how it could be improved.

It appears from literature studies and interviews that a personal structure and approach is essential in knowledge exchange between educational institute and economic life.

Entrepreneurs often encounter a threshold towards educational institutes. From their point of view there is little understanding of economic life.

By using a knowledge broker these bottlenecks can be tackled. Firms can be triggered to define certain problems in useful assignments for work placements. This means that the educational systems gets work placement which enable them to get a taste of reality.

In previous recommendation the initiative was with the educational institutions. However the initiative could also be on the company side. Some companies have already had several students and created work placements for them. When they have a new assignment they contacted a known contact from an institute. The danger in this is that these contacts depend on one person too much. Therefore it is useful to store this knowledge in a more explicit way.

Other companies have assignments, but no clue where they can find students to work on it. The idea of having a bureau that will arrange the connection between company and students will be very useful. The following arguments plead for a bureau:

Firstly it has become clear from the interviews that work placements bureaus already existing do not work efficiently and do not communicate with each other. If the information is centered in one bureau you could cope with this problem.

Next to that companies would be helped by having one bureau. The search for the right educational system would be over. The bureau can take the assignment of the company and forward it to the right educational system. This will increase the efficiency in the system and make it more attractive for companies to use students in their company.

These recommendations have influence on national as well as international work placements. The main goal is to increase findability and matching between company and educational system. Using one office will give the Hansepassage regions the possibility to accomplish this.

In every region should be an office which is part of a network. When they have an apply for a work placement they can contact the right bureau in the right country. In this way the

international offices will know what goes on at local level and they can adapt to the cultural differences in an adequate way.

Appendix Quantitative figures interviews

The number of questioned firms is 50, therefore this data is not valid for quantitative modelling.

General

1. 78% is familiar with work placements; 10% hired a international student;
2. 12% don't want a student, because of too specific working conditions or it demands too much financial / human resources;
3. 16% did offer the student a job after their work placement; 4% use work placements as a HRM-tool to hire personnel;
4. 30 % stay more or less in structural contact with an educational institution.

Findability

1. 74% of firms who offered a work placement, the contact initiative on the demanding site;
2. for the remaining workplaces 4% of the firms uses online databases to find a student; 8% contacts for the first time an educational institution and 14% contacts an institution that is familiar;
3. 20% have had some troubles to find a suitable student for a work placement.

Matching

1. 80% of assignments is formulated in cooperation between enterprise and educational coach;
2. 20% of questioned entrepreneurs like help in formulating the assignment.