

Competence-Oriented Training Provides Stimuli for Cooperation Between Education and Industry

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The competence-oriented educational model has brought the University College Arteveldehogeschool and businesses closer and joined their mutual interests. Expectations of industry have been made explicit, deliberated and finally translated into objectives and educational goals pursued by the programme. In selecting these companies, it has been the option of the department to focus especially on growing Flemish companies. In this article the author explains how this has influenced and affected the relationship with the industry. This applies in particular to businesses with which the department works intensively, for instance companies organising daytime classes for the students, as they should pattern for a contemporary, even progressive personnel policy. They have to live up to their exemplary function and role as learning organizations. Alternatively, businesses aiming to improve their Human Resources Management policy receive stimuli to polish up their own personnel management and are aroused to follow suit through their cooperation with the department. Especially in the graphical sector, where investment in training of employees occurs sporadically and where a permanent urge for innovative changes in products and services are imperative to remain profitable, education may inspire companies through its educational paradigm. Just as the department itself consults and actively seeks out businesses to profit from the latest trends in Human Resources Management. This kind of exchange deepens the relevance and significance of the working relationship.

Introduction

In its decree of 2004, the Flemish government requested institutes of higher education to organise a curriculum for their students based on competence profiles. As a consequence, all the departments of the University College Arteveldehogeschool, including the Graphical and Digital Media department, laid down the contours of a competence oriented curriculum, and identified and qualified the specific competences they wanted to pursue in their education. In this new paradigm, the earlier emphasis on knowledge transfer is replaced by a better preparation for a professional career. Students are in the driving seat and control the learning path themselves. They are the project owners and bear responsibility for the choices they make and the results they achieve. To organise this learning process as efficiently as possible, work simulations and company-close learning situations are integrated in the curriculum. Inspiration for this is acquired in the industry. Our intense and long existing contacts with businesses ensure that our education keep a finger on the pulse and are fed with ideas concerning new applications and suggestions to improve and actualise our programme and HR-management. We value these suggestions very much and incorporate them when relevant and feasible into our programme. But this is not one-way traffic.

Also graphical companies may learn of higher education and benefit from our experience. As such a fascinating and refreshing cooperation between industry and higher education arises.

The modern graphical production process has undergone some profound changes

For years now the classical industrial production process based on traditional, craft-like methods has given way to an automation and integration of the different production stages. Technical competences pure and simple no longer suffice. Workers in a modern graphical company are requested to have insight and to think along with the entire production process and are therefore often more widely employable than in the past. The strongly implemented division of labour, conducted by successive, traditional production steps, was exchanged for knowledge of the process, social competences to cooperate in team and a sense of responsibility to contribute to a final product. The former craftsman has removed their coat and has exchanged it for that of a process keeper who activates previously programmed focuses and reacts to technical hitches afterwards.

Education is not lagging behind...

Our university college should not be oblivious to

these developments. They are to be translated into a contemporary framework of competences with a practice-oriented learning process for the students. Therefore a competent student has to demonstrate the behaviour and skills which one expects today of a starting professional. Late 2004 we contacted about 140 Human Resources-managers and consultants of the graphical industry and probed for their perceptions, recommendations and experiences with the working force. By means of this feedback we set to work. The acquired information was pondered, filtered, completed and assembled in a competence matrix: the motherboard of our curriculum'. Problem-directed education, tailor-made learning paths, (peer) assessment, individual and team work and (peer) coaching have become the mainstream and one by one have found their niche in this educational model. These selected educational working methods are no coincidences or whims. Actually, most of the new didactic forms were not invented by education; they originated in the industry but were adapted to fit the educational goals; these didactic methods now allow lecturers to examine whether students actually master particular competences, know-how and attitudes.

... and stimulates the industry by means of its competence agenda

Some companies put our students/interns/apprentices in mere executive line functions to pump up their own production capacity. These companies no longer fit in this educational model. Training of uniform, repetitive operator skills do not belong in a curriculum which focuses on flexibility, mobility and the acquisition of knowledge, views and competences in working processes, independent of specific business situations. Competence-directed education demands that the industrial partner also shares this philosophy and pursues a personnel policy based on competence management of its employees. To monitor and assess the learning process of its students, the University College Arteveldehogeschool develops distinct and adapted instruments. If this should not yet be the case, companies get acquainted with the way we organise competence management as they will be involved in assisting the institute in coaching the intern or the student working on his or her final thesis. It is gratifying to note that through this kind of cooperation, businesses that

are less progressive or well-developed in the area of people management get exposed to new Human Resources techniques and are encouraged to integrate them into their personnel policy. In this presentation I will attempt to expand on the specific areas where business can obtain some positive impulses from competence-oriented curricula.

Stimuli for the personnel policy

By going along with this educational model of competence acquisition, the company increases its significance and relevancy for the learning path of a student and contributes to a profound training of the young professional. The department receives stimuli to develop its personnel policy too, and vice versa. By doing so, education and industry together propel and push social innovation in the graphical sector.

1. The accomplishments of students on work placements should be assessed on the basis of the competence matrix. This way companies get to know the criteria that assist in assessing the competence level of a student (or an employee) and become familiar with the principles of a learning organisation.
2. A large-scale consultation of our network preceded the establishment of the competence matrix by the department. Personnel managers of successful graphical companies were questioned about the competences they expect of new and older employees. An understanding of these competences allows an outsider to get a glimpse of the Human Resources Management processes of Flemish top companies and indirectly provides tips and recommendations for a modern personnel policy.
3. The appraisal of the internship and the final paper is effected through an assessment of the individual achievements. This way of evaluation may be applied in industry too, for example when recruiting new employees and in developing a personal development plan.
4. This competence matrix shows managers the importance of "broad and flexible" training, away from task-specific and static function profiles.
5. Intake interviews, coaching, feedback and individual follow-ups comprising a written

'The competence matrix is drafted in Dutch but will be translated into English and will be available for distribution soon.'

reflection, point out to companies the need and the importance of reflective and pro-active communication with employees.

6. The competence-oriented educational model highlights the learning aims of the student. Individual learning paths and follow-up of students draw companies' attention to the importance of a growth path and the individual co-worker's personal route of development.
7. Active competence management prevents a one-sided orientation on technological solutions and slows down a process of social ossification. It creates commitment and loyalty because it encourages and supports personal development of employees.
8. Working on competences, PDPs, etc. requires managers to engage in discussions and reflection with their working force. How do we reconcile (the sometimes divergent) interests? This stimulates the development of a long-term strategy to handle human capital and innovation and for the company to act as a learning organisation.
9. In competence-oriented education one talks of the self-regulating student: the student who is responsible for his or her education through self-control. In industry this is translated into an employee who is able to work independently and is observed through coaching, discussions, performance check lists and interviews.
10. Finally, a student does his work placement in the sixth term of his training. After (at least) five terms the student is expected to master most of the end competences we aim at and to be ready to be involved in the production process of a company as a junior employee. This means that even during the last term as a student, he or she should give evidence of competences such as an attitude towards Life Long Learning, of their capacity to be a multifunctional team player focussed on the processes rather than the individual outcomes.

Cooperation between education and industry inspires

The competence-oriented educational model has brought the University College Arteveldehogeschool and businesses closer and tied up their mutual interests. Expectations of industry have been made explicit, discussed and finally translated into objectives and educational goals. It has been the option of the Graphical and Digital Media department to focus especially on growing Flemish companies. In this article we have tried to show that this influences the selection of companies we wish to cooperate with in the learning process too. This applies in particular to businesses with which we work intensively: for instance, companies organising daytime classes for our students. This should form a pattern for a contemporary, even progressive personnel policy, so that they may live up to their exemplary function and role as learning organizations. Alternatively, businesses aiming to improve their Human Resources Management policy may receive stimuli to polish up their own personnel management through their cooperation with education. Especially in the graphical sector, where training of employees occurs sporadically and where a permanent urge for innovative changes in products and services are a need to survive, education may inspire companies through the educational model. Just as we too consult and actively seek out businesses to profit from the latest trends in Human Resources Management. And that is an inspiration...



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