“If it is organised bottom-up then you barely think about regulations and your autonomy is not compromised”

“During our conversations about a joint module with the different programmes within the department we discussed which literature we could use. Finally, we established that this should not be the basis for the discussion. Maybe the literature still has to be written”

“Initially it felt like we needed to fit a circle into a square, but it soon became apparent that there seemed to be a lot of possibilities”

11. Future-oriented Learning within the Business Sector

A Department-wide Educational Reform through Cooperation of Five Programmes

Frans Jacobs, Janine Haenen, and Hester Lentz

Introduction

The future of the business sector for students in higher education is uncertain. The reasons for this are technological developments, the effects of globalisation and the shifting of business models (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014; Helbing, 2014). The consequences of digitalisation and robotisation are large for professions in the financial-economic sector, such as accountancy and finance, business economy, and marketing (Frey & Osborne, 2013; Deloitte, 2016). As a result, certain jobs will disappear, but on the other hand new types of jobs will arise.

It is expected that people in employment will have to have a strong adaptive ability to handle fast changes. There is an increasing expectation that they need to be mobile between employers and that they should be able to deal with a variety of new tasks, roles and positions (Dochy, Berghmans, Koenen, & Segers, 2015). Professionals need to have a sense of great flexibility in order to be able to anticipate these changes based on their own power and ambition. In addition to this adaptive ability, good interpersonal skills are essential due to the need for working in multidisciplinary teams on complex issues (Onstenk, 2017). The Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (Sociaal-Economische Raad, 2017) presumes that the level of basic skills required to participate in an increasingly complex society is continuously growing, and they advise upcoming professionals to train their resistance, flexibility and the ability to continuously develop in order to maintain sustainable employability. In this way professionals regularly need to be able to reinvent themselves during periods of change (Van Water & Weggeman, 2017; Frie, Potting, Sjoer, & Van der Heijden, submitted for publication).

What do these changes and requirements mean for higher education? At the moment students are educated based on the so-called national end qualifications or competency profiles which lead to a specific profession. Is this still realistic? Because of fast changes in the business sector the question arises in what way professional education can prepare students for flexible employability for the job market. The ability to engage in life-long learning – which has been an aim since 1960 (Unesco, 1960) – is essential.

This chapter will describe how the Department of Business, Finance & Marketing (BFM) of The Hague University of Applied Sciences (THUAS) has found an answer to the challenges of a Department-wide educational innovation. First it is outlined what this innovation involves and how it will be designed. The net paragraph clarifies the overlap in the competency profiles of the five programmes of BFM. Then the next steps of this educational innovation process are described. Finally, insights will be discussed as to the role of the lecturers and the business sector, as valuable partners, within this educational reform.

Department-wide educational innovation

With a sharp focus on substantial changes and developments within the business sector, BFM has taken a critical look at their own programmes and asked themselves if they adequately equip students for the future job market. The conclusion is that the programmes are not completely future-oriented at the moment. This is the reason why the Department has set up a project called the Network Curriculum (NWC). The NWC is especially developed for the five programmes of BFM (1) Small Business & Retail Management, 2) Marketing, 3) Finance & Control, 4) Accountancy and 5) International Business) in order to build a Department-wide future-oriented educational offer which anticipates the fast changes in the business sector. It provides students, within a flexible and forward-looking curriculum, to develop into flexible business professionals. In addition, students will be able to make their own choices based on individual qualities, needs and ambitions. This means that within the education programme students can establish their own student journey, enabling them to create their own profile and allowing them to distinguish themselves in the job market.

When BFM is able to accomplish these educational ambitions (future-oriented education including a student journey) students will gain insight into the future business area and will learn how they can be flexible and adaptive, so that they will enter the job market as flexible business professionals with the ability for life-long learning. Within this educational reform students will get the chance to approach issues from diverse perspectives: on the one hand students will learn within the context of the chosen programme and on the other hand students will operate by considering the various point of views of the four other programmes. This is beneficial because in their future job they will then be prepared to work effectively together, and will be able to make use of each other's expertise and points of view in interdisciplinary teams. For this reason, it may also be valuable for lecturers to develop their education in cooperation with other programmes: it creates the opportunity to share expertise and everyone can make contributions based on their content related and shared qualities.

First of all, in order to reach this ambition, it is necessary to gain insight into what the commonality in the profiles of the five BFM programmes is. This analysis resulted in an overview of thirteen clusters of overlapping themes, such as Marketing and Sales, Entrepreneurship, Management & Organisation and Information Technology (IT) (Faculteit BFM, 2016). The aim is to cooperate based on the outcomes of future-oriented education. In the academic year 2016-2017 the decision was made to start with the development of joint modules by almost half of all 200 lecturers of BFM during the so-called 'dune days'. Lecturers had the freedom to re-create their modules by implementing their own wishes and methods. As a result, a lot of energy was created and unexpected new ideas and initiatives were developed, such as:

● lecturers within the expertise area 'IT' ascertained that IT is an inherent part of several modules. Because of this they wanted to create a connecting role with the realisation of an IT-landscape which brings all business areas together and is available for all BFM programmes. In addition, every programme can provide the IT-landscape with data, which will result in a Department-wide database.
● 'Accounting & Control' lectures linked the knowledge and skills which students need to learn in this area to the COSO-model: a frame of reference for internal control and management. This model shows students how the expertise areas are related, what purpose is linked to reach certain competencies and how they can put this into practice.
● the expertise area 'Research' discovered that the Marketing Programme uses the 'H-model', a model that is useful for all programmes. This model gives insight into the complete research process, which is relevant for all higher education students, and gives clear guidance for doing practice-based research (See Figure 1).

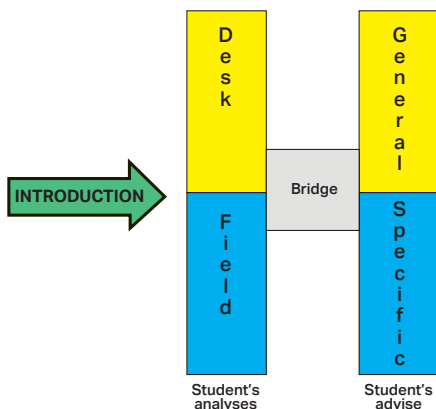**H-Model for an assignment of a company / entrepreneur**

Figure 1. The H-model for practical research.

These ideas confirm the overall experience of almost all lecturers during the 'dune days': satisfaction of having the opportunity to take initiative and pleased about the exchange of information with peers from other programmes. In order to achieve the common organisational implementation, the lecturers would like to have an unequivocal framework.

The concrete development of the joint modules for the first year took place in the academic year 2017-2018 during the four 'development days'. Content and didactics of each module, supported by programme managers and team leaders, were developed in accordance with a communal educational framework (BFM, 2018) with design criteria, an assessment guide and an unambiguous, modular structure. Each development day had a specific schedule:

1. inform and get to know development teams;
2. compare learning outcomes and set up a module outline;
3. design modules based on design criteria, a module description and an assessment matrix;
4. establish learning activities by using a tool for a blended curriculum design (developed within THUAS).

During the development days there were also experts in attendance to support the development teams with regard to different areas, e.g. testing, formulating learning outcomes, blended learning.

A crucial element within this development is student counselling. In the first semester of the first year this will be part of the 3 European Credits (EC) project module. The introduction of each study programme is organised separately so that students have the opportunity to really connect to their own programme. Next, students will work together in interdisciplinary teams in a business game. In addition to creating awareness about the other disciplines, it also serves to raise the profile of each programme. Coaching has an important role for the students with regard to gaining interdisciplinary, academic and cooperative skills. Each student has a supervisor/coach as contact and will create a personal portfolio within a digital environment. The content of the portfolio will be regularly discussed with the supervisor/coach. In the long term the portfolio can be used as a valuable resource with regard to designing the student journey of the student.

Commonality in the programme profiles of BFM

The opportunities of the Department-wide cooperation for the long term are brought together in a document analysis. The document analysis shows all the content overlapping elements of the five programmes of BFM. The analysis was done in 2017 based on the national profession and competency profiles, and end qualifications of the five programmes of the Department[1]. The documents give a high degree of direction to the content goals of the programmes. The expectation is that this document analysis results in a clear overview of commonality in the challenges and descriptions of competencies within the business area.

The variation of the five documents turned out to be quite broad regarding size and details, because there are no required standards. How the documents are established is mostly the same: from national committees in cooperation with stakeholders from related programmes in the Netherlands. In all cases they are based on analysis and reports from the business sector. Only the Accountancy Programme has a strong interconnection with the professional association and has to work with a specific legal framework. The national programme profile of Finance and Control is based on a vision document of the professional association. A similar relationship with the professional association is not described in the other three documents. This is understandable because the business sector of these programmes is broader and more diffuse than the other two programmes. All documents include descriptions about the relevant developments and trends in the business area.

The document analysis took place in the following three steps:
1. list statements of important challenges in the business sector and required competencies of the graduates in the business context.
2. a division of the statements in themes.
3. in the document the statements were combined and compressed to present compact, common phrases.

1   These are:

1. Eindkwalificaties accountantsopleidingen 2016 and Beroeps- en opleidingsprofiel HBO-Bacheloraccountancy-opleidingen, 2017.

2. Landelijk Opleidingsprofiel Finance and Control, 2016.

3. Commerciële Economie: de blik naar buiten; Landelijk Beroeps- en Competentieprofiel Bacheloropleiding Commerciële Economie, 2012.

4. Framework Competencies IBMS: International Business & Management Studies International Business and Management Studies, 2010; Core and Comparison Set, 2016.

5. Beroepsprofiel Small Business en Retail Management, 2014.

Results

Step 1 resulted in 187 statements about challenges and 152 statements about the required competencies.

Step 2 lead to three themes of the statements about important challenges. The description of the end level of the competencies resulted in six themes.

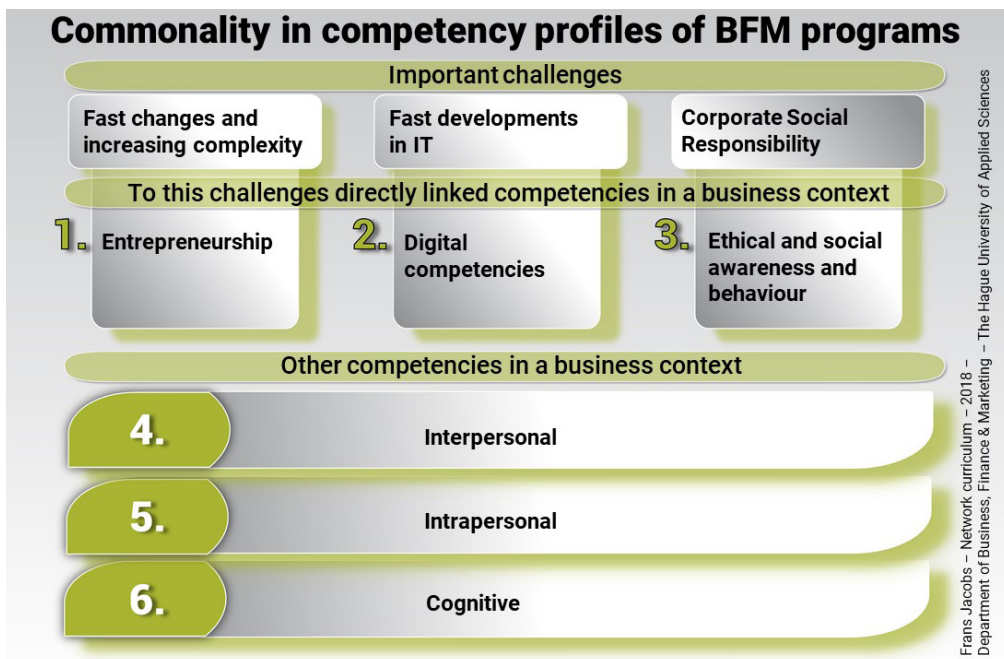Step 3 resulted in compact phrases, which are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Commonality in challenges and competencies in the competency profiles of the five programmes of the Department of BFM.

First of all, three important challenges for business professionals are mentioned in several profiles:
1. Fast changes and increasing complexity in the network society of a globalised world.
2. Fast developments in information services and IT that becomes more important.
3. Corporate Social Responsibility including sustainability and accountability that put important new demands to profit and not-for-profit organisations.

Directly linked competencies to these challenges in a business context are:
1. Fast changes and increasing complexity are met by Entrepreneurship, especially being future oriented, flexible, proactive, creative and innovative.
2. Fast developments in information services and IT are met by comprehensive digital competencies.
3. Corporate Social Responsibility including sustainability and accountability are met by Ethical and social awareness and behaviour of the business professional.

Other competencies in the business context are:
4. Interpersonal competencies, such as communication and social skills, constructive and connecting collaboration and awareness of cultural differences. Many texts emphasize these attitudes, skills and capabilities of business professionals.
5. Intrapersonal competencies, such as self-reflection, the ability to learn and personal leadership.
6. Cognitive competencies, such as explorative and conceptual capacity, critical attitude and a comprehensive approach.

Possible next steps

The model which shows the commonality of BFM (Figure 2) gives direction to the question of which parts within the curricula of the different programmes can be developed and implemented in cooperation with each other. However, after the development of the joint modules of the first year, the next question is in how this helps to take the next steps.

Based on the common competencies within the model, diverse Department-wide modules can be developed. In this manner a wide range of modules come into existence where students can make their own choices about modules and have the opportunity to follow their own path: the student journey. Supported by strong student counselling, students will be given the possibility to strengthen their own profile within their programme. The students will get the chance to decide for themselves where they want the focus of their programme to be, something which supports the aim of developing the talent of the individual (Thunnissen, 2016). This has an important contribution for the future job market, (as explained earlier) in that they require flexible professionals with a clear profile who intend to bring added value. At the same time, this can contribute to strengthening or accomplishing more intrinsic motivation amongst students, such as proved in the Self-Determination Theory of Ryan and Decy (2000; 2017). A feeling of autonomy, competency and connection are three basic needs of students, which, if achieved, form the foundation for intrinsic motivation.

The Department-wide and programme specific modules are developed in a modular structure in order to keep the curriculum future-oriented and adaptive. All programmes use the same organisational standards (such as period, duration, structure), so students will actually have the possibility to build their own student journey. In addition, it allows modules to be renewed quickly resulting in up-to-date curricula, and students will be educated by learning about the most current developments (SURF, 2016).

What does this look like in practice?

BFM has chosen for a Department-wide modular structure in which each programme decides on its own curriculum and cooperates with other programmes where possible. Each programme maintains its own so called CROHO-number (Dutch: *Centraal Register Opleidingen Hoger Onderwijs; the National Register for programmes in Higher Education*) and applies their end qualifications. Per programme there will be certain modules that are mandatory for students to meet the final criteria of their programme. Additionally, each student can choose either Department-wide developed modules or modules offered by one of the other programmes. This way each student can build an individual student journey. In this manner every programme will keep their own individual character linked to their own national requirements, which also lead to the specific diploma per programme. Each module contains 3-EC or a multiplicity of this and every study year is two semesters (this is in line with the University-wide educational framework and vision, De The Hague University of Applied Sciences, 2017). The same development criteria and assessment guide will be used when developing the modules. The learning outcomes of the Department-wide modules are determined together, and in this way can also be used in different programmes.

Finally, the competencies of Figure 1 can be implemented into learning tracks through all the programmes within the Department, and perhaps even in other courses within the University of Applied Sciences. An example is a research track, wherein competencies such as critical thinking can be implemented by diverse programmes. In a research track (including the graduation project) it is valuable with regard to quality as well as efficiency for lecturers of diverse programmes to connect and share expertise. This is also the case for student guidance and communication skills modules.

What does this look like in practice?

Now BFM is actively developing (the learning track) student guidance. This is being done based on a student-guidance vision where students work on improving their self-development and self-management skills. BFM distinguishes the following three goals:

1. Learn to Learn – Gradual construction from close guidance of the learning process to more self-management.
2. Professional development – Insight into one's own development with regard to one's own talents and ambitions with respect to the future business sector.
3. Guidance of the student journey – Valuable information resources with regard to the range of modules from which students can choose, combined with a coaching approach based on content and learning strategies.

Most of the BFM students come from a previous educational system that follows an instruction-based methodology. This makes it a challenge for BFM to establish a well-organised guidance structure within the educational reform. Research (Jolles, 2016) shows that the brain of a human continues to develop long after the twentieth year of life. The pre-frontal cortex in particular, which is important for overview and planning, develops up to the 25th year of life. And around self-determination and self-management important developments within the brain continue to occur. This implies that a large number of the incoming students are not or not sufficiently able to have a good overview of the disadvantages and advantages of their choices in the long term. From our own research (see chapter of Hensel, Jacobs and De Jong in this book) it can be inferred that, depending on the ability of the student to work autonomously, a gradual transition from instruction-led to question-led methodology needs to take place. The most important task is to realise the goal commitment of the student.

Conclusion

This chapter explains what the ambition of the Department of BFM is and in which manner the Department-wide educational reform will be achieved. In our eyes it is essential to take small steps, such as working in the same structure, developing modules together and setting up a student guidance learning track, in order to realise great progress. Two elements are of the utmost importance: the role of the lecturers and cooperation with the business sector.

The role of lecturers
Lecturers have a vital role and it is important that they have enough space and time to develop or maintain their strengths in order to develop this educational reform (see chapter of Potting, Frie and Jacobs in this book). It is a challenge to continue to focus on the profiling and business sector, while on the one hand developing modules Department-wide and on the other hand maintaining their own programme. The governance structure within the University of Applied Sciences does not contribute to the cooperation between programmes. Within the Department we can see that it is difficult for the lecturers to take into account all of the requirements and experiences,

such as competencies, programme profiles, end qualifications, CROHO- and NVAO-requirements (*Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie; the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders)*, evaluation- and NSE-results (Nationale Studenten Enquête; National Student Survey). This is very understandable because altogether it forms a complex whole. Requirements need to be fulfilled, but at the same time it is of the utmost importance to push borders and to cooperate on a Department-wide level. In addition, it is a challenge with the new educational reform to find a balance between what at first sight may seem like conflicting interests, such as on the one hand Department- and University-wide frameworks, organisation and structures, and on the other hand the passion, energy and autonomy of the lecturers.

It is shown that the professionalisation of lecturers regarding concrete behaviour and ownership of the innovation are of utmost importance for success: "The most successful innovations have in common that they are directly linked to the professionalisation of lecturers or intended changes in teaching methodology. These are innovations where the vision is being translated into concrete behaviour of both teachers and students (Waslander, 2011). "Teachers constitute the most important capital which the University of Applied Sciences has and "(…) the ownership of the innovation rests largely with the individual teachers" (Van der Klink, 2012, p. 15). Within our educational reform lecturers were given flexibility with regard to developing the requirements and were encouraged to think out of the box and work across the various programmes. Lecturers are key figures and need to be facilitated to use their expertise to look to the future and to develop future-oriented learning environments. Support and foundation from the management and continuous and complete communication is essential.

Cooperation with the Business sector

Cooperation in co-creation with the business sector is necessary in order to grow towards becoming an adaptive professional (see the chapter of Jacobs, Bleeker, and Schaaphok in this book). It is precisely our partners in the business sector who are confronted with the newest trends and developments. Until now the focus has been mainly on looking inwards about developing our educational reform: cooperation within the Department; between the programmes. In our opinion, this internal focus was needed: the attention to programme profiles, to culture and the expertise of the lecturers provided the opportunity to take the first steps together within a far-reaching educational reform. The crucial next step will be looking 'outwardly': cooperation with the business sector. It is with this in mind that BFM is researching the possibilities of allowing students to graduate with different types of business products (Losse, 2016), and the necessary cooperation with regard to this within the Department as well as

with the business sector. Are there, based on the similarities of the programme profiles, possibilities to develop the graduation project together? Business products can then be achieved on a more realistic level and with more of a link to actual business practice.

A future-based personalised learning environment is the answer to the challenges in a world which is changing fast. This chapter describes how Department-wide BFM will realise educational reform. In order to achieve the ambitions of BFM we contend that small steps wherein lecturers cooperate across programmes and inspire each other from their own perspective and expertise is essential. These small steps can be the overture to cooperating on larger projects, such as the integration of business products. It is important to work from the character and the culture of the five programmes, the requirements from the business sectors, the business contexts and the needs of the current and prospective students. Cooperation within the Department is therefore the first step, but collaboration with the business sector is an important next step in order to reach the ambition of BFM.

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