

EERA: The talent organization: a contextual analyses of universities in the Netherlands using a multi perspective approach

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Conference:ECER 2013, Creativity and Innovation in Educational Research

Network:22. Research in Higher Education

Format:Paper

Session Information

22 SES 11 C, Policy, Management and Governance in Higher Education

Paper Session

Time:2013-09-12
17:15-18:45

Room:STD-401

Chair:Didi M.E. Griffioen

Contribution

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The past decennia universities in the Netherlands and in Europe have undergone several substantial changes. The ultimate goal of the reforms is to ensure the long term European pre-eminence as both a knowledge producer and transmitter, and to strengthen the European position in the global knowledge economy. All in all, transparency, accountability and efficiency as well as quality and excellence are central themes in Higher Education in the Netherlands and the rest of Europe (Enders et al., 2011).

For excellence in research and education the availability of talented, creative and innovative and scientists is crucial (Florida, 1999; Verbree, 2011). Especially for universities the human resources are the most valuable asset for the success of an organization (Fruytier & Timmerhuis, 1995). Literature shows that the characteristics, the drive and preferences of the scientific staff are one of the determinants of scientific performance (Van der Weijden, Verbree, Braam & Van Besselaar, 2009).

However, organizational excellence is not the total sum of all excellent employees in the organization. Excellent scientific staff is an essential condition to achieve organizational excellence, but also other conditions are important. Structural and cultural conditions have an influence on the work environment of the scientific staff, and therefore on the performance of the group or the entire university (Pelz & Andrews, 1976; Birnbaum, 1988; Van der Weijden et al, 2009).

Universities in the Netherlands are aware of the importance of talent. Talent management and performance management has entered the strategic HRM agenda of most Dutch universities (Van der Brink, Thunnissen & Fruytier, 2012). More and more Dutch universities are focusing on the Anglo-American model for structuring

and governing their organization. Talent management policies and practices of private multinationals like Shell or of excellent universities in the USA are seen as good examples and copied, such as the tenure track system (Fruytier & Brok, 2007). The question is whether these models for talent management related to a US and private context are adequate for public organizations..In studying HR policies in science organizations, the specific characteristics of scientific work, scientists and science organizations need to be taken into account (Fruytier & Timmerhuis, 1995; Timmerhuis, 1998).

The aim of the paper is a contextual analysis of universities in the Netherlands: an analysis of the key issues and external developments, and how they affect the academic organization, the organization of academic work and the characteristics and preferences of scientists. Subsequently, we will discuss effects of these developments on the HRM system and policy (and in specific the management of talent or excellence). We will use multiple theoretical frameworks and perspectives grounded in organizational theory to describe Dutch universities and their context: structural frame, professional frame, cultural frame and political frame. Most literature discusses one aspect of the academic organization: education or research aspect, HRM aspect, financial aspect et cetera. Seldom the different aspects have been presented as one integrated entity. We want to show that using multiple frames or lenses will lead to an integrated, enriched and more balanced view of a situation.

Method

The research consists of a literature study and a small explorative qualitative research. For the literature study we used the databases ?Academic Search Premier? and ?Science Direct? and search engine Google Scholar to collect academic literature on universities and academics in general. We also gathered policy documents on the Dutch Higher Education system, and several Dutch reports of empirical studies on various aspects of the Dutch academic system. The findings of the literature study were tested in and enriched by a small amount of qualitative interviews. We interviewed 12 persons, representatives of a variety of relevant stakeholders, such as a representative of the Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science, a representative of a Dutch trade union and three professors.

Expected Outcomes

After a overview of the most important developments in Higher Education for the past decades, we will describe the internal organization by four frames. -Structural frame: Academic work and the organizational work structure has changed considerably in order to face the dynamics of the external environment. A managerialist and functionalist way of thinking and organizing became more dominant. -Professional frame: The essence of a passionate and intrinsic motivated scientist is still the solid base, but the importance of less traditional competencies grew, such as the ability to obtain external funding or communication skills. -Cultural frame: The academic culture also shapes and reshapes itself to fit the 'new academic' profile. -Political frame: From a political view the academic organization has changed extensively since not only scientists with their professionalist perspective are in the say in the university, but other perspectives from like managers and support staff have an impact on strategic decisions, the organizational culture and structure. We will show that the essence of academic work and working as a scientist can be described in terms of tensions, based on differences in the needs of the organization and of the individual scientist. Talent and talent development is part of that tension.

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This proposal is part of a master or doctoral thesis.

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