

Interactive workshop at Fokker Technologies

Non-hierarchical working environments in the Netherlands



 High Tech NL

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Topsector HTSM (High Tech Systems & Materials) companies are facing a rich variety of issues with regard to human capital. For example, Dutch employers need to attract international knowledge workers. Many of these potential employees are foreign students who have chosen to study in the Netherlands; perhaps they have received their PhD and want to start a career in an attractive function in a Dutch company. However, many foreign students do not stay. Approximately 27% of foreign students stay in the Netherlands after graduating. What is the impact of our country's non-hierarchical working environment? Is it a unique selling point or does it create vague expectations? An interactive seminar dedicated to this issue was held on Monday September 22nd, 2014. About 50 guests gathered in Papendrecht at Fokker Technologies, a high-tech company that was so kind as to be our host.



Attractive

The Dutch high-tech industry has developed a program to inform foreign students and PhD candidates about studying and working in the Netherlands. Teams of recruiters and a delegation from Holland High Tech – the brand organization of top HTSM companies – visit for example MIT in Boston and the Hannover Messe in Germany to talk with



Jos van Erp: "Welcome"!

candidates about working in the Netherlands. One of the unique selling points that are

presented is the country's non-hierarchical working environment, which we feel should be attractive and thus be a pull factor. But what is a non-hierarchical environment exactly and how is it perceived by those who study or work in our country? That was the main question addressed at an interactive seminar organized by the organization High Tech NL on Monday 22nd at the Fokker plant in Papendrecht, which is close to Rotterdam in the province of South Holland.

Innovation and knowledge workers

A group of around 50 people gathered at the main entrance of Fokker at 1:30 pm. Among them were 25 foreign students from the



50 people gathered

Technical Universities of Delft and Leuven (Belgium) and employees of Xelvin who work at a temporary base for several high-tech companies in the Eindhoven area. The group was completed by managing directors, HR managers, researchers and advisors. A program had been prepared to make sure that everybody could give his or her input, get to know each other and exchange experiences. Jos van Erp, Program director at High Tech NL, welcomed his guests and gave a short presentation about topsector HTSM and the Human Capital agenda before giving the floor to Mr Arjan Vergouw, Director of Public Affairs at Fokker Technologies. Mr Vergouw presented the business activities of Fokker,



Mr Vergouw: "high-tech industry and innovation are strongly linked"

which includes the design and manufacture of (composite) structures for military and commercial aircrafts, design and production of electrical wiring systems and aircraft overhaul services. Fokker delivers these subsystems and services to many of the Original Equipment Manufacturers in the world incl. Airbus and Boeing. Mr Vergouw, the first keynote speaker, stated that the high-tech industry and innovation strongly rely on the availability of international knowledge workers.

The next keynote speaker was Mr Henk van der Tas, Managing Director of Beteor, a training, coaching and advisory expertise centre focussing on highly qualified Dutch and international professionals. Mr Van der Tas presented the internationally accepted theory of Mr Geert Hofstede which is used to compare different cultures and their mutual effects on productivity and work satisfaction in different working environments. He thereby introduced the central issue of the day: the non-hierarchical working environment that characterises the Netherlands.



Interactive table discussions

I learned something new!

A team of moderators was ready to guide the table discussions which were held in small groups. Each of the five tables focussed on a different aspect of non-hierarchical culture through questionnaires which were prepared by alumni students from Maastricht University. The small groups moved every 20



A team of experienced moderators

minutes to another table in order to mix the groups. This approach guaranteed a maximum yield of input and information. During the wrap-up it became clear that the discussions not only provided a lot of new insight into the various aspects of the issue, but a lot of new questions popped up as well. In general the program was appreciated by the participants. As one of them noted, "At every table I learned something new!"

A substantial contribution

The moderators will work out a report on the content produced at each table. This report will be sent to the participants as well as to the managing teams of leading HTSM companies and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences so that our event will have a substantial contribution to the development of the understanding of this unique and interesting issue.

By Jos van Erp

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