



AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

Industrial PhD: A new approach to organisational and staff development

DATE: August 2014

"The project has led to academic development for me, as well as whetting and strengthening my motivation for my job. I am seeing my work through more interesting and more qualified eyes than before I initiated the project. I have also become more academically oriented in my approach to my consultancy job."

Ole Lauge Sørensen

Industrial PhD student at Aalborg University/Rambøll Management Consulting

FAST FACTS

Country or Region:

DENMARK

University:

AALBORG UNIVERSITY

Business partners:

- Rambøll Management Consulting

Area of UBC:

- MOBILITY

Project start date: February 2013

Project end date: April 2016

Keywords:

- High academic level
- Long-term cooperation project
- Integration in the company

PROJECT SUMMARY

The project focuses on ways to address the individual with regards to facilitating change. The scope is management development, e.g., coaching, and the PhD student is focusing on methods for talking about what is possible in terms of changing something in an individual's (management or employee) own life and in an organisation.

The point of departure for the project is literature on organisational development and change theory, as well as philosophical literature on human development, e.g., existentialism.

CASE STUDY IN DETAILS

Project Background and Needs

The company wished to establish a research unit to strengthen the knowledge base of the company's products and services. The motives were to hold on to talented employees; to heighten the academic/professional standard of the company's services/products; to offer even stronger knowledge-intensive services on the market; to brand the company through having an R&D department and to facilitate specialist innovation internally in the company.

Project Solution from University's Side

The Industrial PhD student is enrolled at the university for the duration of the 3-year-long PhD project and assigned a supervisor (researcher). At the same time, the Industrial PhD is employed in the company and spends the majority of his time there (working on his PhD project).

The PhD student performs the necessary, qualitative research: exploring the available literature, presenting his results regularly at workshops (in the company as well as at academic seminars) and drawing up the new models/approaches based on his research. These are then communicated to the company and applied in the company's services/management consulting.

Project Solution from Partner's Side

The company has set up a research unit with 4 Industrial PhDs to

Key Objectives:

- High academic level;
- Long-term cooperation project;
- Integration in the company.

Lessons learned:

- Make sure that the project is productive for the company - be ware of defining a project that is too theoretical or has too limited academic scope to be easily transformed into business.
- Make sure to hold regular meetings with both the university supervisor and the company supervisor.
- Setting up a research unit with (e.g.) 4 Industrial PhD students makes for a dynamic academic environment within the company.
- Granting the Industrial PhD position to a current employee is an advantage in terms of prior knowledge and insight into the company. This makes for better (and more directly applicable) results.

University profile:

Aalborg University was founded in 1974 and currently has around 15,000 students enrolled.

The university offers education and research within the fields of natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, technical and health sciences – often in close collaboration with regional, national and international industrial partners.

All university programmes are based on a unique model of teaching and learning: the problem-based, project-organized model also referred to as “PBL - The Aalborg model”. This model gives the students the possibility of spending part of each semester focused on a specific project within their field. The project work often takes place in teams and often takes its point of departure in real-life problems from industrial collaborators.

work on individual projects within the field, thus creating an academic unit within the company. The unit is managed by a company employee who himself has completed an Industrial PhD and who is thus familiar with the formalities and challenges of collaboration between industry and university.

The Industrial PhD was employed by the company prior to his PhD project, and as such has been given leave from his usual work for the 3-year duration of the project.

During the course of the project, the company supplies knowledge and expertise, and the PhD student has an office in the company and spends most of his time there. He is thus a part of the daily environment in the company, easing the knowledge transfer to and experience exchange with his colleagues and co-PhD students.

Achievements and Impact

The project aims to contribute with a new approach to organisational and management development in companies, encompassing both the individual employee and the organisation at large. This may lead to new products and services for the company, as well as a heightened status for the company's current services as the knowledge and expertise on which they are based are strengthened academically.

For the Industrial PhD, the project leads to an expansion of his personal network within the field, both in terms of industrial and academic contacts, as well as a new 'language' and way of talking about his field. Furthermore, the project leads to a significant professional/academic development for the PhD student which he can utilise in his later work in the company.

Quantifiable Outputs for University

- 2 publications.

Quantifiable Outputs for Partner (s)

- Subsidy of €70,000 for the PhD student's wages over the course of 3 years.

CHECKLIST OF PREREQUISITES TO SUCCESS

Formal aspects

- Formal practical level Co-operation Agreement is signed between University and Partner(s) which defines particular roles, outputs, reporting mechanisms and other relevant aspects.
- Clear roles and responsibilities are defined for University.
- Clear roles and responsibilities are defined for Partner(s).
- Project partners have agreed on specific deliverables to be produced as a result of the co-operation.
- Project is related to at least one strategic priority of the Partner(s).

Quote of the Business Partner:

"We expect the Industrial PhD students to become academic spearheads who inspire other employees to take the same road. Furthermore, we expect to get a stronger professional and academic profile towards our customers, enabling us to raise our prices and be seen as special experts within these areas."

Tobias Dam Hede

Managing consultant, PhD, Rambøll
Management Consulting

Financial and/or Infrastructure aspects

- Co-operation Partner invests financial resources in the project.
- University invests infrastructure and/or material type (in kind) resources in the project.
- Co-operation Partner invests infrastructure and/or material type (in kind) resources in the project.
- University gains non-monetary but measurable and verifiable benefits from the project.
- Co-operation Partner gains non-monetary but measurable and verifiable benefits from the project.

Human capital aspects

- University is devoting its human capital, know-how, competence to the mutual cooperation, specifically, academic staff and administrative staff.
- Co-operation Partner is devoting its human capital, know-how, competence to the mutual cooperation.

Marketing and communication aspects

- Project and/or project results are communicated within academic and/or scientific communication channels (research papers, scientific conferences and activities).
- Project and/or project results are communicated within internal marketing and/or communication channels within the University and/or Partner institution.

For More Information

For more information about the case study contact Pia Stigaard on pss@adm.aau.dk.

For more information about the project "FROM BRIDGING TO SUCCEEDING. University and Business Co-operation Through Success Stories." and for more case studies visit www.university-business.net

For more information about the Nordplus Horizontal programme visit www.nordplusonline.org

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