

NEWSLETTER

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Management Training - Practice Firm in Switzerland

1. Overview

Management Training was established, as a consequence of the unemployment situation, in October 1995, under the aegis of the Employment Service of the Canton of Vaud, in Switzerland.

Based in l'Alle Street in Lausanne, Switzerland, its main mission is the training of job seekers in the commercial and administrative environment. The purpose of the training is to quickly reintegrate job seekers into the labour market.

Management Training is a practice firm; it performs purchase and sales transactions in relation with other practice firms in the national and international network.

To date, Management Training is the only practice firm in the Canton of Vaud, which offers its trainees the opportunity to accomplish the measure RAVA (recognition and validation of knowledge).

2. Organization

Management Training has six departments, namely: Purchase, Sales, Accounting, Human Resources, Reception, Marketing and Public Relations.

The work is organized in such a way that the trainees in the various departments gain real business experience and technical skills.

New trainees are assisted in carrying out their work by former trainees, under the supervision of trainers, responsible for each department.

Management Training offers its trainees the opportunity to evaluate and implement their theoretical knowledge and to develop and complete their professional training.

The working time is devoted to 60% to commercial practice, 20% to the search of employment and 20% to training (workshops, self study, and use of software ...)

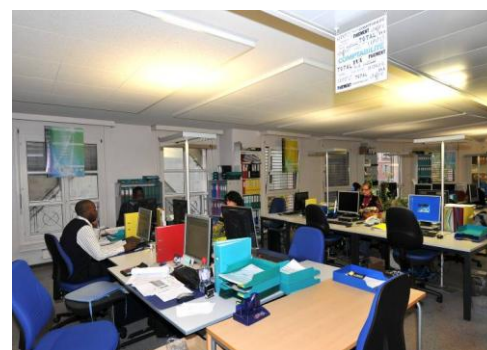
With a capacity of 28 to 30 workplaces, Management Training provides an average annual turnover of 250 trainees.

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Management Training Practice Firm
Trainees



Management Training Practice Firm

Practice Firm and the EMQS certification process at the Erik Dahlbergsgymnasiet, Jönköping, Sweden

We started, fall 2001, with the practice firm concept at Erik Dahlbergsgymnasiet. A rapid growth in interest for the course ensued. The trainees showed a great inspiration in learning how a real company works. The ongoing contact with other practice firms in other countries was another source in attaining valuable experiences and knowledge for the trainees.

During the fall season of 2007 we started the EUROPEN certification process as a means of developing the quality of learning amongst those students who had been actively participating in the practice firms. 31 trainees have successfully been taking part in the EUROPEN Minimum Quality Standard process (EMQS) and received the EUROPEN Quality Certificate. Two more trainees will hopefully be certified before the end of 2009. During the spring, some 50 more trainees have indicated their interest in doing the Mapaz MZ based tests to obtain the EUROPEN certificates.

The usage of the certification process has created a new dimension for the practice firm training. It has induced a steady growth of interest for the work in the practice firm concept, and the status of our economy course has increased. Our trainees have been interviewed by the media, local radio and press. We feel a great flow of positive energy in our practice firms, which today involves 130 students in 8 practice firms, due to the EMQS process and certificate.

The practice firm is used during the whole second year of the course in economy. The trainees do practical work for seven to eight weeks on each department of the practice firm, and when changing from one department to another, they go through a minor test.

At the end of the course, all participating trainees have the chance to do the test in Mapaz MZ for the EUROPEN Quality Certificate.

The tests consist of one theoretical and three practical exams, including eight different personal reports. One of these reports has to be translated into English and faxed to the Swedish Central Office, BTC, for examination.

The icing on the cake is the possibility for those trainees, who have achieved the EUROPEN Quality Certificate, to prepare and participate in international practice firm fairs, during the last semester of the course (third year). In 2008 our school did partake in the fair in Barcelona with the practice firm MQ Sweden. Now the students, who have received the certificate, are preparing the participation of the Barcelona fair in 2010, where two practice firms will be present from our school. We have recently been granted money for this participation, largely depending on the response to the excellent result of training in the practice firm, and the certification of trainees.



Madeleine Esbjörnsson:

"To work in the practice firm, and the opportunity for certification, is the most worthwhile and fun that have happened to me during my course in economy. The certificate has generated, for me, a chance to do my practice abroad on the island of Kreta, teaming with the parent firm Ving AB. And when I leave the secondary school this coming spring, this will prove an extra merit in applying for a job. I warmly recommend this working procedure."



Jan Andersson, Ann-Britt Friberg, Stefan Henning,
practice firm trainers at the Erik
Dahlbergsgymnasiet:

"We who work as trainers at the practice firm, and do the assessment in the certification process, have never before experienced trainees so pleased with the course, and at the same time we really enjoy to work as teachers in the course. There is a constant flow of appreciation from our students. The work in the practice firm is highly activating, resulting in a nearly complete endorsement of the concept from the trainees. The certification has, on our part, been a possibility to show practical knowledge in entrepreneurship and how to run a business. This has been of great value for our students."

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Multidimensional student assessment in Practice Firms in Austria - an example for competence-based teaching

Educational programs have recently shifted from an input orientated to an output orientated approach. It is no longer enough to concentrate on the input (e.g., classroom design or curricula) – there has to be an increased focus on output and outcome of the learning process. Very often, the term output is used synonymously to the term outcome, although they describe different notions.

Whilst output is defined as the determined stage of development of the knowledge and competences of students after a specific point in time, the European Union (2009) states that outcome is concerned with what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate after a successful completion of a process of learning. Learning outcomes are further expressed in terms of competences and skills which can be demonstrated and therefore assessed (Adam, 2004). Accordingly, there is a relationship between learning outcomes, competences, assessment criteria, assessment and teaching methods (Moon, 2004).

Business simulations are significant examples for competence-based learning with the important variation Practice Firm.

Several terms are used for this complex learning and teaching method all over the world, e.g., Virtual Enterprise in the United States, Virtual Company in Asia and Training or Practice Firm in Europe. Practice Firms can be defined as pedagogical learning places where procedures similar to real-life companies are executed based on business principles in a virtual market economy. Business and economic systems are simulated as realistically as possible to enable trading and cooperation within the national and international network of Practice Firms. The main difference between real-life companies and Practice Firms is that no real goods, services and money are exchanged (Berchtold & Trummer, 2001). The method Practice Firm aims at enabling learners to act independently and to make their own decisions according to existing business rules and legal regulations. While working and learning in this close-to-reality business environment, the students can put their theoretical knowledge into practice to train key qualifications and gain new business skills.

Thus, the Practice Firm offers the possibility to develop the learner's professional, social, methodological and personal competences to operate autonomously in a given situation (Riebenbauer & Stock & Slepcevic, 2009).

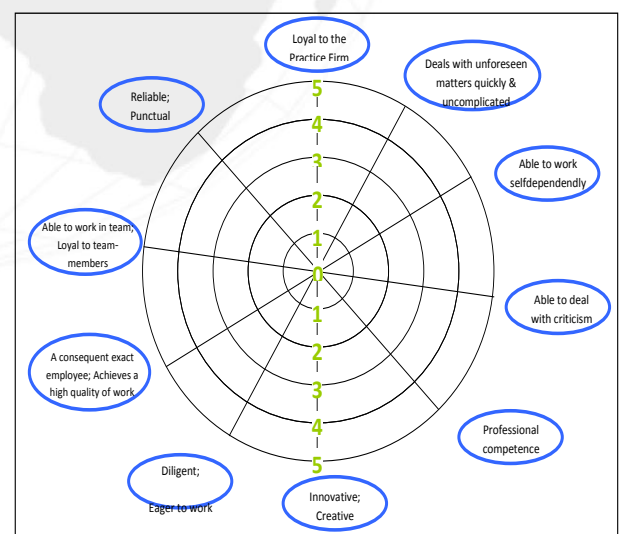
The orientation towards learning outcomes implies the need for competence-based learning as well as a competence-based student assessment. The ideas for innovative self and peer assessment presented in this article enable individualized business education. Furthermore, various methods and instruments for a multidimensional design of students assessment are introduced, such as assessment circle (360°feedback), portfolio, learning diary, skills demonstration and appraisal interview. The instruments for a multidimensional assessment are results of the authors' teaching experience with the Practice Firm KFUNline Übungsfirma-Weiterbildungs GmbH at the University of Graz. All presented instruments are used in this Practice Firm although not all instruments are always used at the same time. Requirements of the complex learning method Practice Firm can be met by the use of these instruments for a multidimensional assessment of student's achievement. The connection between requirements and assessment instruments is shown by the following examples: Learners must be able to act independently (e.g., assessment by skills demonstration, assessment sheet).

- Learners should not be left alone with their problems (e.g., assessment by learning diary, assessment circle).
- Learners need to be accompanied, advised and supported by teachers in the Practice Firm (e.g., assessment by e-portfolio, appraisal interview).
- Learning processes or actions in the Practice Firm must be goal-oriented, planned, autonomous and complete (e.g., assessment by portfolio) (Berchtold & Stock, 2006).

All introduced assessment methods are either based on the concept of self-evaluation or on the concept of evaluation by others. Both concepts help students to become aware of their processes of learning and lead to a reflection upon their actions. Furthermore, both concepts allow students to gain autonomy because of their chance to take part in their assessment by evaluating themselves or their colleagues (Winter, 2008).

Assessment Circle

Based on the concept of 360°Feedback, the assessment circle is used for self-evaluation as well as for evaluation by others. It can be inserted at various stages of the course to illustrate the learning process and learning progress. Moreover this instrument enables students to be aware of their self-perception compared to how they are perceived by others (Paradies & Wester & Greving, 2005). At KFUNline this method is used to give students a clear picture of the maturity level of their own skills. It enables students to recognize the gaps between the current and desired maturity level in connection with their work at the Practice Firm. Figure 1 shows the assessment circle at KFUNline.



Article to be continued in the spring issue