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Advisory Report on improving Dutch/German partnership communication – Diagnosis and Recommendations

Noorderpoort

NON - CONFIDENTIAL

Author: Vivienne Duensing 318919

1. Assessor: Peter Pratley

2. Assessor: Pieter Swieringa

Company Contact: Minke Kloppenburg



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Executive Summary

The following advisory report depicts the diagnosis and recommendation of a communication problem in Dutch-German cross-border project partnerships of the Ems Dollard Region for one of the project partners, Minke Kloppenburg, international project manager at Noorderpoort. The special interest of Noorderpoort is to participate in the cross-border projects in order to offer their students international practical work experience in Germany through traineeships of about 12-20 weeks. The overall goal of the projects is to diminish the Dutch-German border and its implications for economic, social and educative life by creating sustainable networks through partnerships. The communication problem within this context is the insufficient knowledge in how to effectively coordinate communication between the partners that would yield a productive, efficient and successful communication, which would increase effective and sustainable cross-border cooperation. Theoretical research areas were derived from the project context and led to the insights into (1) inter-organizational communication, (2) Dutch/German culture characteristics and (3) knowledge management. The project context and theoretical research areas have led to the following research objective:

- a) *The research objective is to make recommendations to Mrs. Kloppenburg, project coordinator international projects Noorderpoort, on how to improve the inter-organizational communication of Dutch/German partners in the Ems Dollard Region,*
- b) *by*
 - 1. *gaining insight into barriers and success factors in inter-organizational communication*
 - 2. *assessing Dutch/German cultural characteristics influence and*
 - 3. *providing an overview of knowledge management factors supporting inter-organizational cooperation*
 - a. *By conducting semi—structured and unstructured interviews with Dutch/German project partners of the Ems Dollard Region as well as desk research.*

The derived key concepts of the research areas enable a deep understanding of the areas of interest. Research objects were Dutch and German project partners of the inter-organizational cooperation with Noorderpoort. They provided their perspective, which could be compared to the theoretical implications. Primary data was collected in form of semi-structured and unstructured interviews with Dutch/German project partners of the Ems Dollard Region. Furthermore, secondary data was gathered through desk research.

The research results led to conclusions and recommendations on which the advice was based on. The advice consists of the 'tool box – 3 in 1'. The deliverables which make the advice are (a) team building exercises, (b) survey tools and (c) yellow pages. The team building exercises take into consideration the aspects of trust and its implications on the relationships between the partners. Additionally, the survey tool has been developed to advance the exchange between the partners and increase intercultural competency. Lastly, the yellow pages provide a knowledge platform on which partners have room to express themselves openly. Furthermore, the outcome of the exercises as well as the survey tool will be used to increase the content on the yellow pages. Overall, the advice will be implemented by an intern who will, over a period of 5 months promote the exchange through the new communication initiatives. The objective of this research to improve the Dutch/German partnership communication will therefore be achieved. Moreover, the client's goal is to improve their performance in inter-organizational cooperation in order to have efficient partnerships, which will be achieved as well.

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Introduction

This report begins with an insight into the (1) project context, including a problem analysis as well as the organizational context of the Noorderpoort and its inter-organizational cooperation in Dutch/German cross-border projects. The knowledge, practical and communication problem of this research are explored in detail in this chapter. In the (2) theoretical framework chapter, the so called research areas are being explored and key concepts are derived from theory, leading up to the research objective. Consequently, this chapter gives the research its research perspective. The key concepts are derived from the theoretical research areas (a) inter-organizational communication, (b) Dutch/German culture characteristics and (c) knowledge management. The external and internal goal of the research are identified in the chapter in form of the research objective. The (3) research design chapter gives the structure of the research in form of the research framework and shows the interplay between the key concepts in the conceptual model. Furthermore, the central questions and its sub-questions are included in this chapter. The research strategy and research methodology explains the choices made for primary and secondary data collection techniques as well as its validity. Methods used to gather data are semi-structured and unstructured interviews as well as reviewing literature. Following the methods is the (4) results chapter in which the gathered data is presented and answers the research questions. In the (5) discussion chapter the results are put in perspective with the theories and afterwards (6) conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made. The (7) advice is derived from the research outcome, followed by an implementation plan with appropriate communication measurements and planning.

1. Project Context

Noorderpoort (from here on referred to as NP) is a *regionaal opleidingencentrum (ROC)* offering trainings in 16 locations, with 12.300 students and 1000 trainees annually in the province of Groningen (Noorderpoort, 2016). It provides vocational training and secondary education for youth, as well as language and integration courses for adults. In about 160 different programs the school covers approximately 20 domains (Noorderpoort, n.d.). NP has a wide international network with educational institutions and project partners, including Germany, to enable its Dutch students to gain practical experience abroad through traineeships. Traineeships are practical work placements in host companies for a time period of 12-20 weeks in the respective country. Noorderpoort thus finds itself in various partnership in connection with Dutch/German cross-border projects, predominantly in the Ems Dollard Region (see Figure 1: EDR).

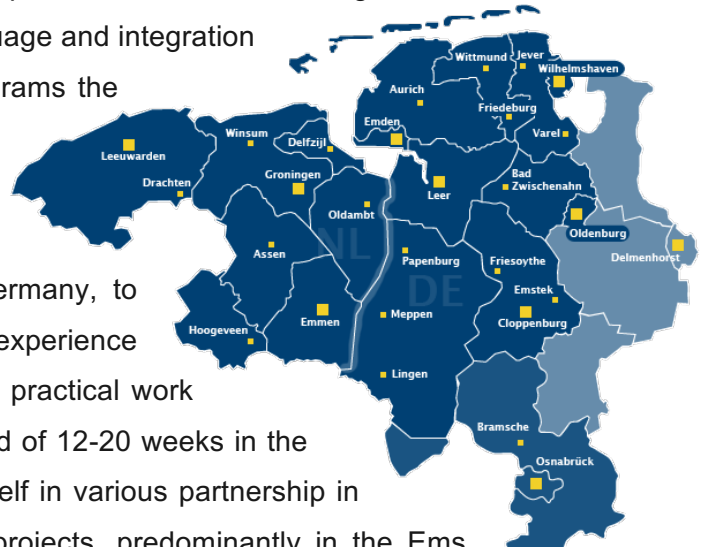


Figure 1: EDR (Eursafety, n.a.)

1.1. Problem Analysis

In conversation with the client, Minke Kloppenburg, the primary objective of Noorderpoort became evident, which is to enable a growing number of NP students to gain a positive traineeship experience in Germany. Specifically, the client objective is to increase organizational performance. The partnership with organizations, business and governmental organizations is a prerequisite to achieve that goal. Without effective partnerships, there would not be financial support, the exchange of contacts and a network to organize cross-border projects in the size necessary to provide traineeship experience for NP students. A new project of the ICT excellence program of NP makes it essential for the client to attain increased cross-cultural organizational knowledge on how to maximize and improve effective and productive communication in these cross-cultural partnerships. These partnerships can be defined as inter-organizational collaboration's, which are "any joint activity by two or more agencies working together that is intended to increase public value by their working together rather than separately" (Kozuch & Sienkiewicz-Malyjurek, 2016). The goal of the client to achieve a growing number of traineeship opportunities with partners pursuing the same goal is applicable as they intend to increase the public value in the future. The imminent organizational problem is thus, the insufficient knowledge on how to improve effective inter-organizational cooperation.

The comprehensive problem is the lack of knowledge on how to improve inter-organizational cooperation, however there are several factors influencing the success or failure of inter-organizational collaboration. Mrs. Kloppenburg voiced her concern acknowledging that she is unaware of what these fundamental inter-organizational factors are, consequently affecting overall influence and production of effective communication and intercultural integration. Each and every successful or failed project can have long-term implications of overall organizational success. She has experienced a failed project, Technik 3, in the past (see Appendix 1.2 on page 51), however also experiences with successful projects such as Sorgen für, Sorgen dass and Praktitrans (see Appendix 1.4 on page 54). She has reason to believe that the communication between projects partners experiences communication barriers at times. The conclusive report of the Technik 3 project states, that “no clear and concise agreement/understanding was given about the project organization and communication” (see Appendix 1.2 on page 51). The causes of the failure as well as the success are to be established in the given research. Furthermore, in personal attendance of a project meeting for the successful project Praktitrans, it became apparent that communication in the inter-organizational cooperation is a complex construct that needs to be further explored to establish a more productive and efficient communication for more effective inter-organizational success. Various partners attend meetings, representing and organizations and simultaneously participating in several projects. The nationality of the partners can vary from the origin of the organization they work for. In such an instance, a Dutch partner works for a German organization and vice versa. The language spoken at meetings varies, depending on the nationality of the partner. Dutch and German is spoken and project material is in the language of the project management. This can result in intercultural language barriers, resulting in a lack of complete cooperation and understanding. Partners have different levels of experiences in the cross-border work and generally in the given network of partners. Meetings are held irregularly and depend on the project. It is unclear how the communication will be facilitated, and therefore it is important that the *inter-organizational communication* between the partners is further examined in this research. This will lead to a baseline on how to improve cross-cultural effectiveness of inter-organizational cooperation.

The cross-border work between Germany and the Netherlands is subject to cultural differences. As mentioned before, language differences, for instance, are conventional. Mrs. Kloppenburg further explains that in her vast experience, the concluding satisfaction of partners about involved projects differs at times. She elaborates to explain that the satisfaction of a Dutch partner about a particular project does not guarantee that the German counterpart will feel the same way with equivalent satisfaction. This implies that at times the satisfaction of partners about the cooperation might differ depending on their cultural background.

Additionally, it is crucial to take into consideration the cultural competency of the partners in the EDR setting. This in turn gives reason to believe that *Dutch/German culture characteristics* needs to be further researched, with a special focus on Dutch/German cultural differences. The effective communication of an applicable recommendation can thus only be guaranteed, taking this area of interest into consideration.

Thirdly, the initial conversations with Mrs. Kloppenburg made clear that the knowledge and insight about the inter-organizational work and experience is difficult to obtain. The orientation of this research was challenged by a lack of information from past projects and the difficulty to obtain the information. This gives reason to believe that increased *knowledge management* of the inter-organizational cooperation needs to be further explored. The information about the aforementioned projects in the region (please view Appendix 1.4.1 on page 54) is given project specifically. Overall information that is inter-organizationally obtained can only be accessed in personal communication with a partner. The recommendation on how to improve the inter-organizational project communication is thus shaped by the intercultural knowledge provided.

1.2. Organizational Context

As described in the problem analysis, the organizational communication problem presented is the lack of knowledge on how to increase the performance of Noorderpoort in inter-organizational cooperation, which can be translated into the communication problem of how to improve the inter-organizational communication in the Ems Dollard Region in general.

1.2.1. Noorderpoort

Noorderpoort follows a mission purpose to educate youth and adult students for a professional career. NP is constantly trying to strengthen the region of the Groningen province as a main motor of the job market, hence building bridges in intercultural communities. This goal can further be applied to the idea of opening up the borders to the international market, especially the Dutch/German border. The practice-oriented learning at NP encourages students to take part in traineeships at organizations and companies abroad (Noorderpoort, 2016). Dutch NP students completing successful traineeships in Germany are a priority. This is due to the fact that NP fosters international experience for its students as well as aims at making the labor market of the Ems Dollard Region appealing to the young generation. Also, the work experience in Germany differs from the experience in a Dutch traineeship as the education system allows more practical experience and is therefore highly recommended by NP. NP differentiates itself from the market by formulating its unique values of '*Trots, echt Gronings en*

met elan', meaning that NP is proud to be based in Groningen, and has proven to be authentic and focuses on strengthening the region (Noorderpoort, 2016).

NP has a direct competitor in the region, the Alfa-college, and thus sees itself in a competitive environment to attract students to choose for NP. Offering attractive international learning experience is one of the strategies to attract students to their school. Therefore, successful projects have an economic and educational benefit for NP. Incentive to choose NP depends on successful project experiences by intercultural students. Word of mouth being one of the greatest influences in advertising and public relations has shown to have huge implications on the success of an organization. The more abundant and routine the students have successful experiences, the more likely they are to also receive word of mouth referrals from students to their peers.

In order to offer these opportunities for its students, NP must rely on inter-organizational cooperation. As mentioned in the beginning, NP wants to grow the number of students completing traineeships and consequently NP needs to increase the amount of opportunities to do so. That in turn, requires the knowledge of how to effectively communicate inter-organizationally to ensure a growing network and partnerships long term.

1.2.2. Inter-organizational network

The inter-organizational cooperation aforementioned can be described as an intercultural network. The umbrella organization, the Ems Dollard Region (EDR) and its overall Dachproject, as well as partners from the Praktitrans project as well as Sorgen für, Sorgen dass project serve as examples of well running projects in the region (please view Appendix 1.4 on page 54; graphic). The Praktitrans project aims at fostering two-way exchange of labor between the German and Dutch border. The stakeholders are students, teachers and companies on both sides of the border. The Sorgen für, Sorgen dass project is the largest project of the EDR and focusing on the work in health and care. Students of domains such as nursing are enabled to complete a traineeship of 12-20 weeks in Germany and vice versa. Goals for 2018 show that the project management aims at increasing the numbers of students to 400 in both countries. They are perceived as successes by partners and are presented as such on platforms and in meetings. The large number of students speaks for itself taking into account the success of the project SFSD. The EDR is the strongest source of funding for projects in the region, as they receive funding from the European Union through INTERREG. Furthermore, they are the leading power in publicity in the region in form of a well-received website and promotional efforts. "Growing significance of inter-organizational collaboration in operations of enterprises and institutions mostly results from uncertainty of the environment, quest for competitive or cooperative advantage, and from the fact that today they are unlikely

to act on their own” (Kozuch & Sienkiewicz-Malyjurek, 2016). Kozuch & Sienkiewicz-Malyjurek point out the importance of this network for NP in order to achieve their goal.

1.2.3. Factors

In the bigger picture of the research context there are societal and environmental differences between Germany and the Netherlands. Starting with the differences in living conditions and economic status of Germany and the Netherlands, leading to a difference in working conditions. This effects the cooperation of NP as the German labor market is in need of skilled students or workers, however the economic benefits for the students are lower in Germany than in the Netherlands for the Dutch students (Kuntze, 2016). Dutch students have a higher income in the Netherlands than in Germany, as their certificates are higher valued and taxes are less. This results in less appealing living conditions for Dutch students. Additionally, the educational systems differ, which can be seen in the graphic in the Appendix 1.5 on page 57. The recognition of educational qualifications of the respective countries is problematic due to bureaucratic boundaries. Literature about the educational differences between the Netherlands and Germany show however, that transparency and acceptance of diplomas is a larger issue than the acknowledgement (Teerling, 2015).

1.2.4. Formulating the problem

The problem analysis and organizational context lead to the conclusion that the main goal of Noorderpoort is to benefit from an inter-organizational cooperation to increase their performance, namely an increased number of traineeships for its students. Consequently, the *knowledge problem* at hand is the lack of knowledge about the causes of barriers as well as success factors for inter-organizational cooperation. The preliminary research gives reason to believe that further research in inter-organizational communication, Dutch/German culture characteristics as well as knowledge management will enable to bridge that knowledge gap. That leads to the *practical problem*, which is the lack of knowledge on how to improve the inter-organizational cooperation. Therefore, for this research, the given *communication problem* is how to improve the inter-organizational communication and thus, to accomplish this, further research is necessary. The communication problem will lead to recommendations, giving insight into how to improve and maintain effective inter-organizational communication, taking into consideration barriers and success factors.

1.2.5. Intervention Cycle

The chosen goal aims at producing a diagnostic-background analysis research. The given problem is identified and acknowledged by the stakeholders, namely the partners, at hand. The causes of the problem as well as potential remedies need to be established in order to pinpoint potential barriers and success factors to reach the desired situation of improving the inter-organizational communication. Therefore, further research into the established areas of interest, regarding factors influencing inter-organizational communication, will be undertaken before recommendations can be designed.

1.2.6. International Relevance

The international relevance of this research is given due to the fact that NP operates in an international, cross-cultural environment by cooperating with German societal and business partners. Moreover, NP aims at minimizing the limits given by the border through effective inter-organizational cooperation, to enable students to easily gain work experience in the respective country. To achieve this labor exchange, NP and its project partners need to be aware of the causes of miscommunication in the course of the inter-organizational cooperation. Consequently, the totality of this research is internationally relevant.

2.Theoretical Framework

2.1. Research Areas

The perspective of the research is made up of the following research areas: (2.2.1.) inter-organizational communication, (2.2.2.) Dutch/German culture characteristics and (2.2.3.) knowledge management. The connection between project context and the chosen research areas will become clear in this chapter. The theoretical research areas will lead to operationalized key concepts related to the external goal of the research, to improve the inter-organizational communication of Dutch/German partners in the Ems Dollard Region.

2.2.1. Inter-organizational communication

Inter-organizational communication, from now on referred to as IOC, depicts the study of aspects on how organizations interact (Shumate, Atouba, Cooper, Pilny, 2017). The project context shows that the inter-organizational cooperation between the partners has a complex communication structure that is in need of further research. The lack of oversight is to be resolved by a deeper understanding of the field through this theoretical research about inter-organizational communication. The increased understanding of IOC will result in an awareness of the current communication, and enables to pinpoint barriers and success factors. Paulraj (2008) points out that “IOC is an important factor and a competency during collaboration, because of its potential to enhance the performance of involved partners”. This supports the connection of this research area to the overall goal of NP, to increase the effectiveness of the partnership to enable a growing number of students to complete traineeships, hence increase public value by an increased performance.

Egonsson & Ngai (2015) refer to the theory of Turker (2014), focusing on inter-organizational communication research, identifying (1) frequency of interaction, (2) trust and (3) power as important variables.

In a communication system, the (1) *frequency of interaction* is a “fundamental variable since the more frequent organizations interact with each other the more likely long-term and valuable relationships will develop” (Turker, 2014). On the basis of that premise lies the fact that different types of relationships are characterized by different interaction frequencies. In order to increase the position of an organization within an inter-organizational network, it can be argued that an increased frequency of communication generates more trust and thus more power for a partner. Increased frequency of communication between two intercultural partners will also facilitate a better cultural and language understanding.

Secondly, the variable of (2) *trust* gives insight into the willingness of the partners to what extent they are communicating information. Furthermore, he refers to Ratnasingam (2005) who established that trust encourages communication to be more open and increased cooperative. Paulraj (2008) establishes that trustworthiness of a partner affects the willingness of other partners to share information and is thus affecting the cooperation. Lack of understanding can have a negative impact on trust as it can fall to the fate of misunderstanding, cross cultural differences, and the inability to fully understand aspects of communication from a different or contrasting culture. It is pertinent to be able to effectively communicate with partners from different cultures in order to accomplish a complete understanding and facilitate complete trust between partners.

Lastly, (3) *power* affects the organizational relationships and can therefore influence the willingness of partners to communicate. Potential barriers surface if power imbalance is given, by partners being more powerful than others and can thus affect the inter-organizational cooperation Turker (2014). Power imbalance is the result of such a constellation and stems from the deep self-interest of organizations to have the tendency to focus on their own goals. This power imbalance can result from lack of cultural understanding. Power displays can vary culturally, which again brings us to the pertinent need for more cultural education and knowledge.

Conclusively, the unraveled key concepts of inter-organizational communication are: (1) Frequency of interaction, (2) trust and (3) power.

2.2.3. Dutch/German culture characteristics

A general overview of the cultural competency in the inter-organizational setting will be given by applying the cultural competency development stages (see Figure 2). According to Cross (1989) (1) cultural knowledge can be described as the familiarization of a person with cultural characteristics. (2) Cultural awareness is the developed sensitivity and understanding of another ethnic group. (3) Cultural sensitivity is the knowledge that cultural differences exist and the acceptance of that, by restraining from valuing the other culture.

Cultural Knowledge -> Cultural Awareness -> Cultural Sensitivity -> Cultural Competency




Figure 2: Levels of Cultural Competency Development (Cross, 1989)

In order to evaluate causes of barriers and success factors in the inter-organizational cooperation of the partners in the Ems-Dollard Region, it is essential to take into consideration the intercultural aspect. The project context has shown that the cross-border work is affected by cultural differences. In order to ensure validity, when establishing barriers and success factors in this area, Christopher Thesing's (2016) study will be used to focus on the most relevant characteristics. The primary dimensions used in research to describe and analyze culture are Hofstede, Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner as well as Hall (Thesing, 2016). The dimensions defined by the aforementioned experts, cover cultural standards on which the given cultures can be categorized by. Thesing (2016) specified these cultural characteristics, by researching their effect on bicultural interactions between German and Dutch partners in the business context. The research found out that certain culture characteristics have a higher conflict potential than others. He focuses on two different categories of cultural characteristics. For one, he explores cultural characteristics that German and Dutch business partners regard as mutually relevant in bicultural interaction, namely hierarchies and details. The *hierarchy* variable indicates the degree to which tasks, responsibilities and functions are defined in an organization. Fixed structures are to be expected in such a setting as well as clearly defined norms and rules. The Dutch emphasize rather on tasks they complete than their function in an organization, showing a different relationship to power. According to the research, Germans are less likely to have contact between different levels of power. The second shared difference in culture is the variable of *detail*, which depicts the degree to which detail is relevant in planning, for example products or presentations. According to the research, this is due to the fear of making mistakes or encountering problems.

The research outcome derived from the key concepts will produce knowledge about barriers and success factors in inter-organizational cooperation on the basis of cultural differences as well as direction on how to use that insight to improve the inter-organizational communication. The unraveled key concepts of Dutch/German cultural characteristics are: Hierarchy & Detail.

2.2.3. Knowledge management

It was mentioned in the project context that it is difficult to gain information about the various projects as well as gain an overview of factors causing failure or success. This theoretical research area will therefore explore the theoretical implications on knowledge management in organizations and inter-organizational settings. The definition of knowledge management (KM) is "a technique that organizations have developed in order to make better use of their intellectual resources." (Blundel & Ippolito, 2008). The knowledge in this research is the experience and information of partners regarding cross-border cooperation. Knowledge is a resource of high value in the field of cross-border project work. This type of knowledge is called

narrative organizational knowledge (Nymark, 2000) is of importance when wanting to focus on uncovering values in the organizational culture and the transference of the organizational culture to new employees. Furthermore, there are several types of knowledge. The tacit knowledge, personal and context-specific, as well as the explicit knowledge, which can be transferred formally in manuals and can be transferred easily. Tacit knowledge on the other hand is more difficult to transfer. The type, nature and source of knowledge has been put in perspective by Freeze & Kulkarni (2007). They stress that lessons learned or best practices are key strategies used to share tacit knowledge as they are the source of human experience. Research has shown that what causes problems in knowledge management are lack of time to share knowledge, failure to use knowledge effectively and the difficulty of capturing tacit knowledge (Blundel, R. & Ippolito, K., 2008).

Therefore, the unraveled key concepts derived from this research area are: *Time, Usage, Capture*.

2.3. Research Objective

The project context as well as the derived key concepts from the theoretical research areas lead to the following research objective:

- c) *The research objective is to make recommendations to Mrs. Kloppenburg, project coordinator international projects Noorderpoort, on how to improve the inter-organizational communication of Dutch/German partners in the Ems Dollard Region,*
- d) *by*
 - 4. *gaining insight into barriers and success factors in inter-organizational communication*
 - 5. *assessing Dutch/German cultural characteristics influence and*
 - 6. *providing an overview of knowledge management factors supporting inter-organizational cooperation*
 - a. *By conducting semi—structured and unstructured interviews with Dutch/German project partners of the Ems Dollard Region as well as desk research.*

The project context showed that the research will be led by a diagnostic background analysis, aiming at establishing barriers and success factors of communication in order to achieve the external goal of the research. The given objective aims at identifying causes of the problem, in order to achieve the communication objective.

The objective is (a) *useful* to the inter-organizational cooperation partners gaining knowledge about causes of barriers and success factors in communication, which recommendations will be given on to improve effectiveness of communication. Based on the project context, the objective is (b) *realistic* to gain relevant information for the client and stakeholders. The focus on the inter-organizational communication, Dutch/German culture characteristics as well as knowledge management enables the (c) *feasibility* to achieve the objective. The objective is (d) *clear* and (e) *informative*, as it is precisely indicating what knowledge will be gained through key concepts and from whom it will be obtained.

3. Research Design

3.2. Research Framework

The research framework gives an overview of the steps undertaken to achieve the research objective (see Figure 3). The communication problem is the lack of inter-cultural knowledge on how to improve the inter-organizational communication. In the preliminary research the problem has been examined and the following research areas have been established: (1) inter-organizational communication, (2) Dutch/German culture characteristics as well as (3) knowledge management. These areas lead to the conceptual model and key concepts, steering towards achieving the research objective (see Figure 4). The research objects, which have been established are Dutch project partners as well as German project partners. The research objects are to give an insight into the barriers and success factors of the inter-organizational communication and the influence of Dutch/German culture characteristics on it. Literature will further provide an overview of knowledge management theory to offer tools on how to improve the inter-organizational communication. The research objects and the conceptual model will be analyzed in perspective, leading up to the external goal of the research.

Consequently, the research framework reads as follows:

(a) The study of relevant theories regarding inter-organizational communication, Dutch/German culture characteristics as well as knowledge management, supported by the project context, (b) leads to the assessment criteria on which the opinions of Dutch project partners as well as German project partners will be gathered. (c) The results will be analyzed, eventually leading to (d) the recommendations on how to improve inter-organizational communication of Dutch/German partners in the Ems Dollard Region.

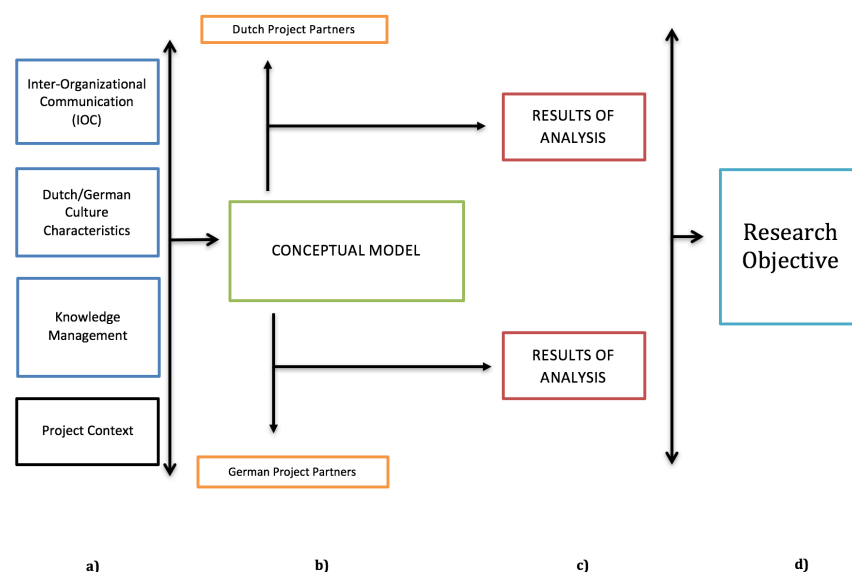


Figure 3: Research Framework

3.3. Conceptual Model

The conceptual model at hand shows the research perspective of this research and identifies the connection between the key concepts and the goal of this research. Theoretical research areas were derived from the project context and lead to the key concepts. In the field research the key concepts are to be tested. (1) Frequency of interaction, trust and power of inter-organizational communication, the (2) Dutch/German culture characteristics, hierarchy & detail as well as time, usage and capture of the (3) knowledge management have a direct effect on the external goal. The results gained will lead to recommendations on how to improve the inter-organizational communication.

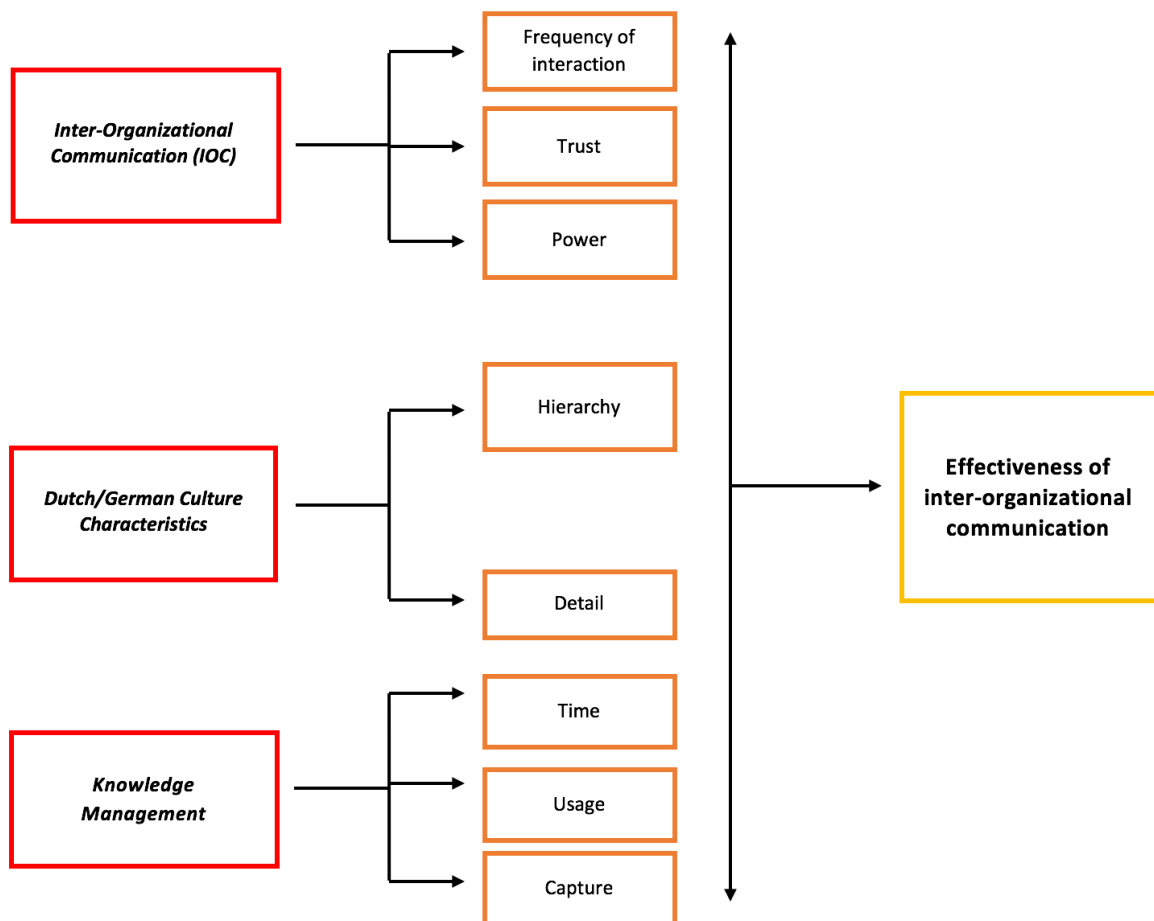


Figure 4: Conceptual Model

3.4. Research Questions

The central questions are based on the key concepts (see Figure 3), designed to obtain prescriptive knowledge to solve the given problem. Sub-questions are derived, going further into depth of the research perspective. They support the central questions and ensure that various types of knowledge are obtained to reach the research objective. The research questions are divided according to theoretical research area, hence key concepts, in order to guarantee a structured analysis. Consequently, the research results give a clear overview according to the key concepts. Therewith other methods of discussion are excluded.

Central Question 1: What barriers and success factors can be identified in inter-organizational communication?

- 1.1. What point in the inter-organizational communication has the highest conflict potential and how does trust influence that?
- 1.2. How does inter-organizational communication take place and what influence has the frequency of interaction on it?
- 1.3. Does the factor power have an influence on the willingness to communicate between partners?

Central Question 2. What can be learned from Dutch/German culture characteristics to ensure effective inter-organizational communication?

- 2.1. To what extent do the inter-organizational partners show intercultural competency?
- 2.2. What are examples of intercultural differences regarding the factor *hierarchy* and what can be learned to give recommendations?
- 2.3. What are examples of intercultural differences regarding the factor *detail* and what can be learned to give recommendations?

Central Question 3: What can be learned from knowledge management theory and research objects in order to make recommendations on how to improve inter-organizational cooperation?

3.1. To what extent do tacit and explicit knowledge differentiate and what are the implications on the perception of the partners in the inter-organizational cooperation?

3.2. What are the perceptions of the research objects towards time, capture and usage of knowledge in the inter-organizational cooperation?

3.5. Research Strategy

The research strategy shows the approach chosen to gain data, necessary to answer the research questions. Empirical research has been chosen as the research strategy for this project. This implies that data is gathered from the real world in order to gain a complete and accurate picture of inter-organizational cooperation. Empirical research is conducted by the means of desk research as well as semi-structured and unstructured interviews. The *depth* of the research results is generated by interviews, whilst the breadth of the research is given by the desk research. A grounded theory approach is thus applied, as theories are compared with field research (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010). The theoretical research area outcome is put in perspective with the findings of the field research. Namely, the key concepts of inter-organizational communication, Dutch/German culture characteristics and knowledge management. The research objects will provide their perception on the aforementioned research areas. Additional desk research will add information to the factor of knowledge management, to build on the insight gained from the research objects.

The validity of the research is ensured by choosing research objects, two areas related to the key concepts of the research areas chosen. Derived from the project context it became evident that inter-organizational communication, Dutch/German culture characteristics and knowledge management are areas of interest. Consequently, the research objects chosen are Dutch/German project partners who are in active cooperation with Noorderpoort in the cross-border project work (see Appendix A 1.4.2 on page 56). The partners act on an executive or operative level in the cooperation. The nationality of the partners does not imply the origin of the organization they work for. The tables below give an overview of the aforementioned factors.

Executive Partners	Operative Partners	Dutch Organization	German Organization
Michiel Malewicz (NL)	Daniela Saathoff (GER)	Caroline Wille (GER)	Daniela Saathoff (GER)
Ilona Heijn (GER)	Caroline Wille (GER)	Anneke Bosch (NL)	Ilona Heijn (GER)
Jule Tirrel (GER)			Michiel Malewicz (NL)
Anneke Bosch (NL)			Jule Tirrel (GER)

Table 1 & 2: Research Objects

The *self-selecting sampling method* was used to determine the interviewees. This is due to the fact that the samples are to be exploratory and the complete sample size cannot be interviewed, due to feasibility. The variety of project partners is given due to the aspects of, level of work, nationality and project active in. The insight into the inter-organizational

communication is thus given as the research objects are active participants in it and experience it first-hand. Furthermore, the chosen research objects are of German and Dutch origin, hence the Dutch/German culture characteristics can be tested. Lastly, the research objects provide the support to provide their perception on knowledge management and thus the choices can be made on how to use knowledge management for the design of recommendations.

The executive and operative research objects give different perspectives on the various research areas in order to establish the source of the problem and make sufficient recommendations. Therefore, the validity of this research can be ensured.

3.6. Research Methodology

The mixed-method research is used, as qualitative and quantitative data collection is taking place. In order to answer the research questions completely, the mixed method is ideal. The outcome will enable to define the most appropriate recommendations as a solution to the problem. The basis of the research lies in the theoretical research areas and the derived key concepts. The chosen method to explore them will ensure the valid and reliable data outcome for this research. The chosen key concepts (see Figure 4: Conceptual Model) will be tested with the research objects, Dutch/German project partners.

Semi-structured and unstructured interviews provide the qualitative information necessary to gain an exploratory and complex insight into project communication and therefore explore the causes and symptoms of the project communication problems and success factors. The theoretical research areas established can therefore be tested by asking open questions to the interviewees, enabling great depth of answers. This method was chosen as the perception of the research objects, providing examples and deep insight is more important to form effective recommendations than quantitative data. The project context showed that barriers and success factors to communication need to be diagnosed, which can be achieved the most efficient way through interviews. The amount of project partners from the chosen projects in the project context is 25 partners. By approaching 3 partners from each project (9 in total), this research was approached. The willingness to act as a research object was lower than anticipated. The amount of interviewees ended up to be 6. The sample of the research objects however, promised to be sufficient to answer the research questions and generate valid and reliable data when discussed with theoretical research. As aforementioned in the research strategy, the self-sampling method has thus been chosen to determine the research objects to conduct interviews with.

Desk Research enables this research project to be based on secondary research, whilst leaving room to reflect the material with the herewith presented research perspective. The basis is therefore to identify relevant theoretical concepts. This furthermore implies that there is no such thing as direct contact with research objects. Referring to the first point, it is clear that the material scanned and monitored during the desk research is used in the perspective of this research, hence not with the intended perspective of the publication. Desk research will be referred back to when the interview results are not able to answer research questions fully. The main theoretical research area receiving special attention is the knowledge management section. In order to ensure the reliability of the sources chosen for this research, only scholarly articles and academic papers have been selected. The key terms used for research are presented in the table below (Table 3). The libraries used to obtain access to the publications is given in accordance (Table 4).

Key terms	Libraries
Inter-organizational communication	Google Scholar
Intercultural business communication	Hanze Mediatheek (Worldcat)
Bicultural partnerships	University of New Mexico (Worldcat)
Knowledge management	University Bremen library (SuuB)
Knowledge management in inter-organizational communication	
Cross-border partnerships	

Table 3: Key Terms & Table 4: Libraries

3.6.1. Limitations

According to Saunders et al. (2009) research is influenced by elements of limitations and thus this research experienced such. The project was set out with time limitations. The set out time period for the graduation assignment at the Hanze University of Applied Sciences started in February 2017 until the end of May 2017. Due to difficulties with a prior assignment for this graduation period however, this research assignment began early April 2017. Consequently, the time frame to conduct this research was immensely limited by half the time. In order to ensure validity and reliability of data collected, the research objects and research method had to be minimized. These most suitable techniques led to a diagnosis of the given problem, however further research is strongly recommended, due to the constraints in time.

The interviews conducted contain personal opinions of interviewees and the interviewer. Subjectivity of the field research outcome thus needs to be taken into consideration.

4. Research Findings & Discussion

The research findings and discussion will be presented in this chapter according to the aforementioned empirical research questions and sub-questions. All the questions are answered in this chapter and thus show the relationship between questions and results. The research context will present insights into the atmosphere and practical matters of the interviews.

4.1. Research Context

4.1.1 Response willingness

The interviews were conducted via phone (3) and face-to-face (3). The interviewees of the phone interviews were, personally known to the researcher. The interview partners were executive or operative partners of various projects and thus had different perspectives. The executive partners seemed to approach the interview with a political perspective and thus a risk of bias can be seen, as the answers were predominantly positive and less critical.

4.1.2. Data gathering

The semi-structured and unstructured interviews were only partially audio recorded. 4 interviews were fully recorded, however 2 were not. With 1 interview the recording stopped due to technical difficulties and with another the setting did not allow it. The audio recordings were transcribed word for word or the interview was summarized in Appendix B on page 58.

4.1.2.1. Translation

All but one interview was conducted in German. The audio recorded data was directly translated to English in the transcription process. Research objects were of Dutch or German nationality and were able to choose the preferred language of the interview to be English or German, in accordance with the interviewer's language skills. Due to the limitation in time, the interviews were directly translated or summarized. The research objects were informed about this process of data management and agreed.

4.2. Inter-organizational communication

Central Question 1: What barriers and success factors can be identified in inter-organizational communication?

The theoretical research area 'inter-organizational communication' that was established on the basis of the project context, lead to the key concepts frequency of interaction, trust and power. The key concepts can be barriers or success factors to the partnership and thus influence the effectiveness of the communication. Additionally, to the given key concepts the research gives insight into when and how the barriers and success factors take place, in order to gain more in-depth information.

1.1. What point in the inter-organizational communication has the highest conflict potential and how does trust influence that?

According to 4 out of 6 interviewees, the beginning of the cooperation between partners is the most crucial time for effective communication, whilst 2 did not want to specify. The groundwork is laid for a long-term partnership in the given cooperation in the beginning. Michiel M. (Appendix B: Interview 1) points out that the communication process about decision-making and planning needs to receive great attention from the beginning on. He emphasized that once decisions have been made that are irreversible, barriers to communication exist that effect the cooperation between partners long-term. These findings compliment the research by Turker (2014) stating that successful relationships are based on trustworthiness of an organization. Jule T. (Appendix B: Interview 4) shares her perspective by pointing out a lack of planning in the early stage, paired with room for interpretation, leading to barriers in communication and thus distrust. This is in accordance with Paulraj (2008), showing that distrust negatively effects cooperation and can slow it down. Also, Ilona H. (Appendix B: Interview 3) stresses that the beginning phase is crucial, "due to the fact that trust and courage is lacking to ask questions and lacking room to mention personal opinions". The majority of the research objects thus share the opinion that the beginning phase of the cooperation is the most crucial, in line with mentioning the trust as the source of potential conflict.

The project manager of Sorgen für, Sorgen dass, Anneke B. (Appendix B: Interview 6) points out that her greatest accomplishment is the successful ground work for a network, by stressing that building trust after the start of the SFSD project was the most important. A success factor in the perspective of Michiel M. (Appendix B: Interview 1) is the focus on building together in order to bring the effectiveness of the cooperation to the next level and increase the

performance and possibilities. Ratnasingam (2005) points out the necessity of openness to be given in order to overcome distrust, as Anneke B. and Michiel M. pointed out.

1.2. How does inter-organizational communication take place and what influence has the frequency of interaction on it?

All interviewees name the same communication channels when elaborating on the communication process between partners. Turker (2014) names that a high frequency in interaction implies a close relationship between partners. The perspectives on the frequency as well as description of the communication will be presented according to communication channel. The channels are Email, WhatsApp, phone and face-to-face.

Email	Email is the dominantly used communication channel in the inter-organizational communication between the partners. Carline W. (Appendix B: Interview 2) described her perception of the frequency of interaction by simply stating “constantly in all directions”. She further elaborates that this is the channel through with the most information is shared. Michiel M. (Appendix B: Interview 1) additionally adds that there has been an attempt to take the load of information from the channel Email by sharing information about meetings through a private section of a website, however that attempt failed. The strong preference of the partners lies with the information sharing through Email.
Face-to-Face	Ilona H. (Appendix B: Interview 3) explains that the meetings take place regularly, on average every 2 months. The importance of personal meetings has been stressed by all and is described as success factor (Appendix B)
WhatsApp	In specific cases WhatsApp is used as a communication channel, based on personal experience of partners. The prerequisite for that is the personal connection to another partner and being aware of the preference. The frequency was briefly described by linking it to the setting of appointment for upcoming meetings (Appendix B: Interview 4). Referring to the face-to-face section, this implies interaction frequency according to the schedule of meetings given in the section.
Phone	Similar to the communication channel WhatsApp, the communication via phone takes place in connection to the special interests of partners and thus takes place before or after face-to-face meetings (Appendix B: Interview 2).

The channels are Email, WhatsApp, phone and face-to-face and the frequency of their usage implies that the relationship between the partners is close and willingness to share information

is given. Additionally, to the findings, further research is needed into the structure of these communication channels rather than the willingness of the partners to communicate in order to find deeper insight.

Another important aspect, expressed by Caroline W. (Appendix B: Interview 2) is her personal experience in the work with partners who pursue daily business next to the inter-organizational cooperation. They consequently have a different awareness of the communication processes. This leads to a difference in the frequency of interaction. Turker (2014) established that a lower frequency of interaction leads to less power in the cooperation. The example provided by Caroline W. fits this theoretical assumption.

Consequently, partners who do not focus on cross-border cooperation have less frequent interaction with the partners and, according to theory, less power and trust in the network. For this assumption to be validated, further research is advisable.

1.3. Does the factor power have an influence on the willingness to communicate between partners?

The responses to potential differences in power were largely denied or fended off, rather emphasizing unity and the feeling of equality among partners. Despite preliminary research showing that the construct of the partnerships and the inter-organizational network being built in a way that the financial source of the projects is given to the Ems Dollard Region and thus a power difference was suspected. Michiel M. (Appendix B: Interview 1), project manager at the EDR, pointed out the pressure of reaching goals, on the basis of statistics to justify the investments made. However, pushing forward the strong unity of the partnerships as well as stressing the equality of partners. Linking this to Turker (2014) it shows that the willingness to communicate is given and thus that trumps the focus of the partners on the goal of the cooperation rather than on individual organizational interests. Anneke B. (Appendix B: Interview 6) of the SFSD project, further explains the benefits of openness towards partners, as being beneficial, despite their power or importance in the network. She states that if “a new partner joins a project, then that partner already has an existing network and therefore brings new contacts to the project.”. Implying that despite power differences, the relevance for cooperation is to have a large network. Jule T. (Appendix B: Interview 4) confirms that perspective with the example of how the information sharing between partners is a given in the inter-organizational cooperation. She is project manager of Praktitrans, a young project and smaller than SFSD. Despite the difference in influence and power of the two projects, she explains that if requests are made at either projects, the partners are willing to exchange

information if that can benefit the other. An aspect Turker (2014) described is that power imbalance leads to trust issues, which in turn leads to less motivation to share information. The aforementioned example of the SFSD cooperation with Praktitrans, however clearly shows that in the given setting that is not the case.

The overall goal of the inter-organizational cooperation is thus motivating the partners to pursue communication cross power levels.

4.3. Dutch/German culture characteristics

Central Question 2. What can be learned from Dutch/German culture characteristics to ensure effective inter-organizational communication?

The theoretical research area 'Dutch/German culture characteristics' that was established on the basis of the project context, lead to the key concepts hierarchy and detail. The key concepts are to show the effects of the intercultural aspect on the inter-organizational cooperation when aiming to improve the inter-organizational communication.

2.1. To what extend do the inter-organizational partners show intercultural competency?

As mentioned in question 1.1. the majority of interviewees names crucial points in the cooperation that cause potential barriers or success. The outcome gained from that question will be further elaborated by focusing on the intercultural perspective. The Dutch partner Michiel M. (Appendix B: Interview 1) mentioned that the cooperation between partners "leads to something being solved in a Dutch point of view but the German side sees it as a Dutch solution" at times. Recalling Cross (1989) the cultural competency of the partner can be established as cultural sensitive, as he does not assess either culture but moreover only states the existence of differences. Despite Daniela S. (Appendix B: Interview 5) her awareness of the cultural differences, Daniela explains that they are nevertheless a source of frustration for her, as she has to adapt to it every time she is exposed to the other culture, in as little as Email conversations (Appendix B: Interview 5). According to Cross (1989) this implies that her cultural awareness is given, however she has not reached the step of being cultural sensitive. The remaining interviewees shared the cultural sensitivity of Michiel, by naming differences in the inter-organizational cooperation (Appendix B). This analysis can be challenged and put in perspective, due to the fact that the majority of the interviewees (5 out of 6) primarily work across the border. Therefore, a follow up analysis of the stakeholders who do not primarily work across the border can be made to further gain insight into these findings.

Overall it can be said that the stage of cultural competency is to be taken into account in the intercultural cooperation between the partners.

2.2. What are examples of intercultural differences regarding the factor *hierarchy* and what can be learned to give recommendations?

An example of a difference in perception of hierarchy has been provided by Daniela S. (Appendix B: Interview 5). She stated that according to her opinion “the Dutch are great salesman”, which she further elaborated on “the project meetings are most of the times in German, the Dutch partners are proactive to adapt to the Germans in many ways on the surface”. However, she does not perceive that this approach is applied when norms and rules should be in place in practice. Thesing (2016) established that a German in this perspective expects strict structures and settings in which he or she feels as powerful as the respective culture. This is however not given in the setting described by Daniela. She rather finds herself in a setting in that she feels powerless, as the principles of work structure, decision-making and influence take place to a different structure than she is expecting. Therewith it can be said that the factor of hierarchy causes a barrier in communication in this specific setting.

Generally, the interviewees gave the perception of unity and equality in the inter-organizational cooperation, despite being aware of the cultural differences. The Dutch partner, Michiel M. (Appendix B: Interview 1) points out that examples of Dutch/German cultural differences are given, however not a reason to focus on the negative but rather the positive. This approach seems to give insight into an approach to cultural differences, which is that clear norms and rules are not important, but rather solutions to problems. What that implies is that from a Dutch perspective, focusing on the outcome and goal is of greater importance than on the factor of hierarchy, hence existing norms and rules. This gives reason to believe that this factor is a source of conflict in the inter-organizational communication if not taken into consideration when formulating and designing recommendation for the given research. The German partner working for a Dutch organization, Caroline W. (Appendix B: Interview 2) gave insight into the tolerance of the Dutch regarding behavior and actions differing from norms and rules. She explains that the Dutch are more open towards changes of that kind, hence having a different perspective than a German partner for instance.

Overall, the answers given in the interviews from Dutch interviewees were strongly focused on the positive and did not take into consideration that a problem is given connected to hierarchy, namely the importance of norms and rules. This in turn was slightly more critical from the perspective of German interviewees who showed their recognition for problems evolving that factor. A difference in perception of the same aspects can be seen between the cultures.

2.3. What are examples of intercultural differences regarding the factor *detail* and what can be learned to give recommendations?

The German partner Daniela S. (Appendix B: Interview 5), does not work across the border full time, thus falls under the description of Caroline W. from question 1. 2.. This means that she could be categorized as less powerful and feeling less trust into the cooperation, if seen from the perspective of the research outcome of question 1. 2.. She views the inter-organizational cooperation as problematic when seen from the intercultural perspective. The main problem she encounters is that “the Dutch see opportunities and Germans see problems” (Appendix B: Interview 5). Put in perspective with Thesing’s (2016) research into the culture characteristic of detail, this is an important aspect. According to Thesing (2016) Germans are more likely to focus on avoiding problems and making mistakes rather than pursuing the trial and error approach as the Dutch do it. This perception difference can thus be concluded to belong to the culture characteristic of detail.

Another example provided from the Dutch partner Anneke B. (Appendix B: Interview 6) exemplifies the importance of clear guidelines of tasks and responsibilities in the intercultural work. She narrated an incident that evolved around a meeting 3 months in the future with several partners. The specific information regarding that meeting are usually sent out 1-2 weeks prior via Email. However, Anneke has experiences that German partners tend to contact her 2-3 months prior and are confused that no information has been sent out yet and question if the meeting is taking place. In the theoretical background of Thesing (2016) it can be seen as an example of the culture characteristic of detail. The need of the German culture to obtain as many facts and details as possible in order to prevent mistakes or avoid problems.

An approach to overcome the different approach to planning and working in the cooperation is described by Jule T. (Appendix B: Interview 4) who implemented to take minutes at every meeting of the Praktitrans meetings in order to be able to reference them if partners have a different understanding of what was agreed upon. The detail factor becomes evident in this approach, as Jule T. avoids uncertainty, problems or making mistakes by taking minutes (Thesing, 2016).

Overall the factor of detail produced a lot of insight into the inter-organizational cooperation, as the research objects willingness to respond increased with this topic. Leading to the assumption that the factor detail is especially relevant for the formulation of a sound advice.

4.4. Knowledge Management

Central Question 3: What can be learned from knowledge management theory and research objects in order to make recommendations on how to improve inter-organizational cooperation?

The theoretical research area 'knowledge management' that was established on the basis of the project context, lead to the key concepts time, usage and capture. The key concepts are to gain insight into applicability of knowledge management in the inter-organizational cooperation.

3.1. To what extend do tacit and explicit knowledge differentiate and what are the implications on the perception of the partners in the inter-organizational cooperation?

The research objects show the willingness and need to have a greater knowledge basis. Ilona H. (Appendix B: Interview 3) for instance, points out that "a strong focus for us is not to do anything double". She exemplifies the results of all interviewees.

Explicit knowledge is a form of knowledge that is separated from practice, in form of a textbook, for example. Furthermore, it can be defined as statistical records or other formal information obtained (Blundel & Ippolito, 2008). This form of information is easy to track, communicate and share, as it can be differentiated from the process of collection. The attendance of a Sorgen für, Sorgen dass meeting, named in the project context, initial impressions were given that explicit knowledge is given in the project by sharing the evaluation of output indicator goals among project partners. Anneke B. (Appendix B: Interview 6), further indicates that this is a form of tracking the success or failure of output indicators in order to report back to financial supporters of the project. Ilona H. (Appendix B: Interview 3) shows that this is the general practice in the EDR and its projects. The general introduction of a knowledge platform for the EDR has been attempted, however failed due to a lack of interest of the partners to use it (Appendix B: Interview 3).

Tacit knowledge management on the other hand is difficult to communicate as it cannot be seen separate from the context of its creation (Blundel & Ippolito, 2008). Meaning that tacit knowledge evolves from direct experience by partners in the cooperation. Theory shows that cultural characteristics have an influence on tacit knowledge, as it is personally created and this effected by the cultural characteristics of the individual (Blundel & Ippolito, 2008). Daniela S. (Appendix B: Interview 5) gives insight into her lack of knowledge about the context of the project she is cooperating in. She perceives a lack of knowledge on her side about the

preparation of the Dutch students for the traineeship in Germany. This lack of knowledge can be connected to the research outcome discussed in question 2.3. regarding the difference in the Dutch/German culture about the amount of detail needed in information. Daniela S. is lacking tacit knowledge of the Dutch partners in the cooperation and thus the cultural component gives reason to believe to be the source of the problem.

Conclusively, the inter-organizational cooperation has an existing strategy of capturing and sharing explicit knowledge, thus project specifically. Due to the fact that partners are not interested in using the cross-project tool such as a 'knowledge platform' it is not necessarily shared across the projects. Tacit knowledge on the other hand deserves more attention due to its complexity to capture and use.

3.2. What are the perceptions of the research objects towards time, capture and usage of knowledge in the inter-organizational cooperation?

The interviewees express that tacit knowledge is shared through the communication channels depicted in question 1. 2.. Michiel M. (Appendix B: Interview 1) points out knowledge and experience are shared between project management, the advisory groups as well as in working groups. Blundel & Ippolito (2008) elaborate that tacit knowledge sharing is vital with a focus on work relationships. The relationships between partners has been described in question 1.1. and 1.3. and will further be described with the perspective of knowledge management. The perception of the interviewees on whether or not enough time is given to share knowledge between partners is thus relevant. Jule T. (Appendix B: Interview 4) perceives that the time is given to share knowledge, however at times partners restrain from doing so, due to the focus on other tasks. The focus on organizational goals or other projects rather than on knowledge sharing in the given setting can cause a lack of time. This implies that busy schedules and complex tasks distract from using the given time to share knowledge. This can cause barriers in knowledge sharing, hence negatively affect it. Ilona H. (Appendix B: Interview 3) explains that despite the attempt to set up a knowledge sharing platform, partners do not make use of it, as previously mentioned in 3. 1.. The main outcome of the interviews shows that there is a large motivation to share knowledge and to learn from each other's experiences, however this does not lead to an effective knowledge sharing taking place. The awareness is that it is necessary to improve the communication and knowledge sharing, however changing the current habits of work practice is not taking place. Jule T. (Appendix B: Interview 4) mentioned that in order to acquire more information in order to gain more experience as a young professional in the network, she joins events and other network opportunities to gain knowledge. Freeze & Kulkarni (2007) state that this approach to tacit

knowledge sharing is the most effective. Barriers in communication, however have been established in the aforementioned research outcome and thus show the need of improvement in this approach. The usage of the knowledge obtained cannot be put in full effectiveness as various partners acquire knowledge from sources outside the network as well.

5. Conclusions

The conclusions drawn from the research will be presented according to theoretical research are and will answer the central research questions. The sum of the drawn conclusions will lead to the recommendations on which the advice will be based on. Due to the limitations and barriers to this research it is advisable to build on the research findings.

5.1. Inter-Organizational Communication

The inter-organizational communication theoretical area led to an overview of barriers and success factors experiences by partners in the inter-organizational cooperation. The majority of the partners interviewed indicated that the beginning phase of the cooperation is the most crucial time in the cooperation. Based on the theoretical outcome, the factors frequency of interaction, trust and power influence these causes of barriers and success factors. This is to partially answer the B part of the research objective, which is to gain insight into barriers and success factors in inter-organizational communication. The partners are aware of the importance of trust in inter-organizational communication and thus underpin the theoretical assumption. Furthermore, the high frequency of interaction between the partners indicates another correlation between theoretical research and the current state between the partners. It has been established that the frequency of interaction is less with partners who do not operate fulltime in the inter-organizational cooperation. This is a potential barrier in communication, as it has an effect on trust as well as power in the relationship between partners and needs special attention when formulating recommendations.

5.2. Dutch/German Culture Characteristics

The theoretical research area of Dutch/German culture characteristics is assessing the influence of the given cultures on the inter-organizational communication. An assessment of the intercultural competence of the partners has been made, showing that another differentiation can be made between partners working full time in cross-border cooperation and partners who do not. The chosen culture characteristics of focus were hierarchy and detail. The conclusions that derived from the culture characteristics show that the German partners are less satisfied with the communication than the Dutch partners, as they are less flexible. Flexibility regarding the degree of detail given in information. Furthermore, it is essential to take into consideration the norms and values in the inter-organizational cooperation, as the German partners experience difficulties to adapt to changes. Generally, a difference in perception of the same aspects can be seen between the partners of different cultures. The

theoretical implications have, in that respect, been underpinned. However, it is to be taken into consideration that a reasoning purely on the basis of cultural differences cannot be made as the partners interviewed are experience in the cross-border work and have a cultural awareness. This implies that the influence of the culture characteristics is given, however does not predominantly serve as the main source of barrier in the inter-organizational cooperation in the EDR.

5.3. Knowledge Management

The theoretical research area knowledge management is to provide an overview of factors supporting inter-organizational cooperation. The interviewees showed an awareness of the need of open knowledge sharing and the motivation to improve it in the inter-organizational cooperation. Theoretical research has shown that that the sharing of tacit knowledge is problematic and cannot be done easily. This became evident in practice, as the partners experience difficulty to do so. Consequently, the attention must be given to improve the tacit knowledge sharing in the EDR. The implications of theory are that strong work relationships need to be given to do so.

6. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn in accordance with the given theoretical research areas the following recommendations can be given.

6.1. Inter-Organizational Communication

- The frequency of interaction needs to be consistent
- Partners who do not work full time in the inter-organizational cooperation need to receive special attention
- The beginning stage of inter-organizational cooperation requires effective trust building
- Use willingness to improve and focus on common ground

6.2. Dutch/German Culture Characteristics

- Detail in planning of materials, events and context needs to be provided
- Norms and values demand focus
- Cultural competency of partners needs to be mutual

6.3. Knowledge Management

- Tacit knowledge sharing needs to take place in the inter-organizational cooperation
- Project information must be provided across the EDR
- Work relationships between partners are a focus
- Sustainability and long-term success is of utmost importance to research objects

7. Advice

Based on the research, the advice for Minke Kloppenburg, international project manager Noorderpoort, will be given in form of a 'Tool Box - 3 in 1' to recommend how to improve the inter-organizational communication with partners. The following advice will touch on several important aspects. (7.1.) The client's problem and organizational goal will be referred to in order to illustrate that the client's acceptance is given. Potential barriers to the design and implementation of the advice will be taken into account to ensure that it is effective in practice. Furthermore, the focus lays on having an implementable design of a creative set of tools for the client. In order to ensure this connection, the research conclusions and recommendations will be closely reviewed and related to choices made for the advice. Lastly, the internal and external context will be provided to address existing structures in communication and showing the use of such to have an easy implementation of the advice. Moreover, the deliverables of the (7.2.) creative tool box will be presented. A detailed (7.3.) implementation plan, exploring the monitoring of the tools effectiveness as well as the means to achieve it will be presented.

The expressed goal of Mrs. Kloppenburg, and consequently of Noorderpoort, was to enable increased opportunities for NP students to complete intercultural traineeships in Germany, which is to be achieved by strengthening partnerships across the border. Consequently, the increased effectiveness of the inter-organizational communication is the desire of Noorderpoort and guides this advice. It can be concluded that the advice is based on the objective of the organization as well as on the problem of the research, which is the lack of knowledge on how to improve the communication with partners in the EDR. The project context provides an initial scan of potential barriers and success factors minimizing the effectiveness of the inter-organizational communication. Additionally, it was established that the client is lacking knowledge on how to improve the effectiveness. The advice will thus take into consideration the barriers and success factors established in the research and use it to show how to increase the effectiveness of the inter-organizational communication between the partners. The B part of the objective, the knowledge problem at hand, is therefore tackled.

Potential barriers to the advice need to be considered in the design and planning of it. Noorderpoort is an educational institution and thus has a limited budget to make use of. The funding of initiatives depends on the applicability to organizational goals at the given time of application for funding. A potential barrier facing the implementation of the advice could be that the funding is not considered to be undertaken. Another potential barrier is the resistance or willingness to change of the partners in the EDR, that Noorderpoort cooperates with. The research has shown that partners have years of experience in the inter-organizational

cooperation across the border and thus could have developed a mindset proving to have resistance to change. The various partners in the project need to be willing to make use of the advice and thus resistance to it can be a barrier. Lastly, a crucial barrier is the lack of time that partners experience. The partners are employed by organizations that either completely focus on the inter-organizational cooperation or only part-time. This has implications on the amount of time that the partners have to invest in the inter-organizational cooperation. Consequently, this is another barrier to be aware of when formulating the given advice.

A set of 3 creative tools are connected to the recommendations and ensure to increase the effectiveness of the inter-organizational communication among project partners. Noorderpoort will be able to make use of the designed tools in order to ensure sustainable and long-term partnerships through effective communication in inter-organizational cooperation. The given advice is focused on firstly being used for the new ICT excellence program, mentioned in the project context. The specialization on the ICT excellence program will ensure to overcome the barriers aforementioned. The effects of the limited budget, time of partners as well as willingness to change can be minimized by focusing on one project. It can be defined as a test run, in order to explore the effectiveness of the advice and to give room to adapt it to expectations and needs that are not taken into consideration at this point. The advice will be translatable to the greater inter-organizational cooperation of the partner, as it is based on the research outcome of interviews conducted with the partners from various projects in the Ems Dollard Region.

The results of the research report were presented in chapter 4 in detail and concluded in chapter 5 & 6. In order to ensure the correlation between the research report and its findings with the advice, an overview will be provided of the outcome that is to be taken into account. The theoretical research areas inter-organizational communication, Dutch/German culture characteristics and knowledge management yielded insight into the research objects perception as well as desk research outcome. Put in relation to each other, this results in a set of recommendations made for the client. The *inter-organizational communication* research led to the conclusion that the frequency of interaction varies between full time cooperation partners and partners who do not operate full time in the inter-organizational setting. As learned from theory, this negatively affects the trust and willingness to share information among partners and consequently it is recommended to make the frequency of interaction more consistent. Furthermore, research shows that the beginning stage of the inter-organizational cooperation is of special importance to the level of trust experienced by the partners. Tools thus have to focus on improving the trust building in the early stages of inter-organizational cooperation. The strong willingness of partners to improve the cooperation in general became self-evident

in the research. Recommendations thus focus on using the motivation and goal that the research objects share to effectively implement the communication intervention.

Dutch/German culture characteristics is of special interest to the research, based on the project context that led to conclusions relevant for the given advice. The perception of the research objects towards the detail of materials and planning in the inter-organizational cooperation showed that change needs to take place. The satisfaction of the German partners in specific is not given and thus recommendations need to be made, increasing the detail in the information received. A shared importance of the research objects is the overall shared goal of opening up the border for increased cross-border cooperation. The expectations regarding the approach, to achieve this goal, however varies between the partners. The norms and values they have towards inter-organizational cooperation need to be addressed in the advice to implement sustainable change. The cultural competency of partners is a source of difference between them and thus should be addressed in the communication intervention to be proposed.

The theoretical research area of *knowledge management* has been explored through research into theory as well as its connection to the inter-organizational cooperation. Outcome has shown that knowledge sharing needs to take place across the border of projects. The implications for the communication intervention are consequently that the partners are to share their tacit knowledge with younger or less culturally experienced partners in order to increase the effectiveness of the cooperation. A focus of interest is that work relationships between partners need to work long term, hence network opportunities are to be given. The key factors of importance to research objects are sustainable and long-term projects, thus they should be translated to the advice and its communication intervention.

The internal and external environment of the advice is taken into account as the communication problem at hand is the basis of the advice. The inter-organizational communication channels are serving as a guideline to implement the advice in. By making use of the given communication setting an easy implementation of the advice is to be enabled. The advice takes into account the aforementioned barriers, as well as the opinions of the partners.

The advice can be implemented by an intern of Noorderpoort. The reasoning for this choice is made as the client emphasized that she lacks time and expertise to solve the organizational problem and thus additional help is needed to implement the advice. The knowledge gap regarding potential barriers and success factors in inter-organizational cooperation has been closed by the means of this research, thus a student intern who has the expertise to implement

the given advice by means of studying it or consulting the researcher. The ideal candidate will be a communication student and must be fluent in German and Dutch. Further detail regarding the process will be given in the implementation plan.

7.1. Tool Box - 3 for 1

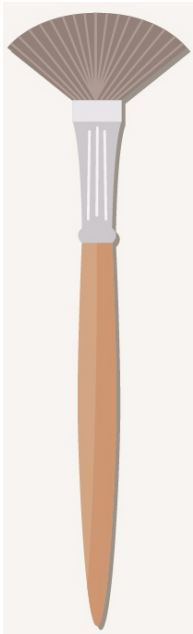
The '3 for 1' tool box is the sum of 3 tools developed to reach the 1 objective of the research, that is to improve the inter-organizational communications between the partners in the Ems Dollard Region. Standing alone for themselves they would not reach the desired goal and thus it is the 'Tool Box – 3 in 1'. In the following chapters the three different tools are presented in accordance with the recommendations they have been based on. (7.1.1.) Inter-organizational communication will be a tool in form of team building exercises focused on trust and sharing a vision. (7.1.2.) Dutch/German culture characteristics is a survey tool serving as a personal tool to share expectations and wishes for the cooperation. Lastly, (7.1.3.) knowledge management will be a tool called 'yellow pages' serving as a knowledge platform exchanging formal and informal knowledge.



The overall goal of improving the inter-organizational communication between the partners will be achieved once the three tools are implemented and accepted by the partners. This will only take place if communicated to them effectively, which will be discussed in 7.2. implementation plan.

7.1.1. Team building exercises

Motto: *Building trust. Sharing one vision.*



Team building exercises are an effective tool to increase the trust between partners. The theoretical research area inter-organizational communication yielded the information that the trust between partners needs to be strengthened in order to ensure close and open relationships between the partners. This is crucial to build a sustainable and long-term partnership between the partners in the Ems Dollard Region, which in turn is a leading goal for all the partners (Appendix B). Exercises of 15-20 min in the beginning of every second advisory meeting between project partners that take place every 2 months (Appendix B: Interview 2) will be implemented. This is the first of the three deliverables. The key focus is to establish personal bonds between the partners and strengthen the focus on the common shared vision and goal of the cooperation. The results of the interviews showed that all interviewees believed that a shared vision is the strongest common ground of all partners (Appendix B). The participation of all

partners, including part-time cross border active partners will help to strengthen common ground. The frequency of communication could be affected by this initiative indirectly, fostering an increased interaction between partners due to improved personal relationships. Effective communication relies on trust between partners. Establishing trust can be complicated. Incorporating partner familiarizing exercises, enabling the partners to believe in the abilities of one another, and ensuring willingness to accept the work and input put forth by partners is essential. Establishing such exercises, which will facilitate strong partnership held at every second advisory meeting, would ensure the maintenance in these inter-organizational relationships. Thus, team building exercises are to aim at (1) building trust, (2) manifesting a shared vision and (3) challenging norms and values.

Preparation of team building exercises

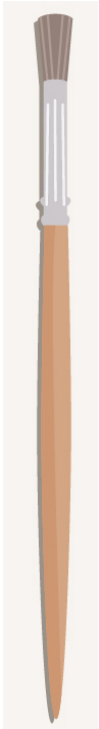
1. Exercises should be chosen around current topics that are relevant and known to all partners. It must not lead to deeper insight into the topics, however capture the interest of the participants.
2. It has to be established how large the group of participants will be. The attendance could vary from meeting to meeting. The exercise needs to be chosen according to group size, as it influences the type of activity.
3. Personal interaction should be given in the exercises in order for participants to open up and gain trust with the other partners.
4. The exercises need to match the professional setting of the meeting. Focus should be put on icebreaker exercises, in order to ensure that every partner is willing to participate.
5. The facilitator of the exercise should feel comfortable to execute the activities and give guidance to the participants.
6. Media products such as movies, visuals (online and offline) as well as supply to use during activities are to be chosen for.
7. Make a final check to ensure that the team building exercise is engaging and interactive.

To choose the right exercise the study of sources should be done on- and offline. Internet search terms to be used include but are not limited to: icebreakers, team building exercises, diversity activity, establishing trust or cultural competency training. Publications regarding exercises are to be found in libraries or can be purchased once the team building exercises have been successfully implemented in the advisory group meetings. Before the exercise can take place, it is essential to set ground rules and give security to the partners in order for them to fully open up to the exercise. This will be implemented once the intern, hence facilitator, follows the 7 preparation steps and chooses an appropriate exercise.

The outcome of the team building exercises are to be used as material for the 'Tool Box - 3 in 1' and thus support the knowledge management tool 'yellow pages', to be elaborated on in section 7.1. 3.. It is therefore important that the outcome of the exercises is monitored and captured by the facilitator in order to make use of the material and enable shared learning from the experience. This proves to be another common interest of the partners (Appendix: B) and most importantly matches the objective of Noorderpoort, that is to increase organizational performance through collective learning.

7.1.2. Survey Tool

Motto: *To expect the unexpected*



The theoretical research area of Dutch/German culture characteristics shows the influence culture had on perception of hierarchy and detail by the partners. Partners showed concern for the satisfaction of partners about decision making and communication to vary if seen from different cultural perspective. Anneke B. (Appendix B: Interview 2) pointed out that at times partners communicate but do not understand each other. Theoretical insights have shown that the cultural variable of hierarchy plays an important role in such a barrier of communication between Dutch and German business partners. The degree to which tasks, responsibilities and functions are defined is thus a source of conflict if not approached with the right tool (Thesing, 2016). Another factor of interest is the variable of detail. It implicates the detail for information provided and given in the process of, for example planning a product or service (Thesing, 2016). The two variables are dealt with in the survey tool. Once every two months the survey will be send out to all the chose partners. In the test phase of the implementation, this includes the participating ICT excellence program partners. However, can be translated to a greater cooperation.

The aim of the survey tool is to generate insight on the cross-cultural make-up of the partners in the cooperation, not limited to one time, however over a long-term partnership. The partners will get a voice to share their opinion, expectations, frustrations as well as success. By enabling the active sharing of information, the personal bond between partners will thus be supported. Furthermore, the goal of the research, to improve the effectiveness of the communication between partners will be achieved as the communication barriers that are caused intercultural will be minimized.

The survey tool is to be presented to the partners at the advisory meeting, at which the first team building exercise takes place. Partners will have the opportunity to ask questions. The facilitator is to stress the benefits of the survey and the necessity that every partner fills it out regularly. As with the team building exercises, the survey tool also incorporates rules that enable the free sharing of opinions. All answers provided by partners need to be treated with respect.

The survey tool will lead to information to be used for the 'Tool Box - 3 in 1' also to be shared on the yellow pages, explained in section 7.1. 3.. The evaluation of the surveys is a crucial step in which the intern will generate tacit knowledge about the cooperation at hand. As theory shows, tacit knowledge is difficult to capture as it is personal and context-specific Freeze &

Kulkarni (2007). By providing this survey tool and long paragraphs to elaborate in, the partners have room to elaborate on their personal knowledge.

An example of the potential layout of the tool can be found below. Google Forms are used as a free online tool to create the survey. The given example is a draft version and does not represent the final product of the survey tool in its totality. As previously mentioned, opinion, expectations, frustrations as well as success are to be shared in the survey tool. Open questions leave room for the partner to fill in their perspective and give context to their opinion.

The image shows a draft survey form titled "To expect the unexpected". The form is set against a light blue background with dark blue header and footer bars. The content is as follows:

To expect the unexpected

Please fill out this survey according to your personal opinion. The results will be shared with the partners on the yellow pages platform and serve as insight into the partners perspective on the project(s). Your participation in this survey is greatly appreciated as it is not complete without your input!

The answers to your survey will be treated with great respect by the facilitator and all partners.

What have you expected to achieve in the last 2 months? Please elaborate.

Meine Antwort

Are you satisfied with what you have achieved?

- ☐ Very Satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ I do not feel satisfied nor frustrated
- ☐ There is room for improvement
- ☐ I am frustrated about what I achieved

Did you receive all the information you wanted/needed in the last 2 months? Please elaborate.

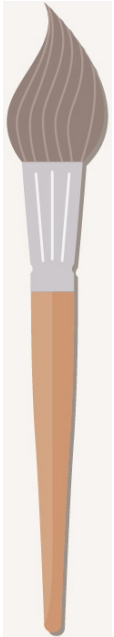
Meine Antwort

SENDEN

Graphic 1: Survey tool draft

7.1.3. Yellow Pages

Motto: *We know more than we can tell*

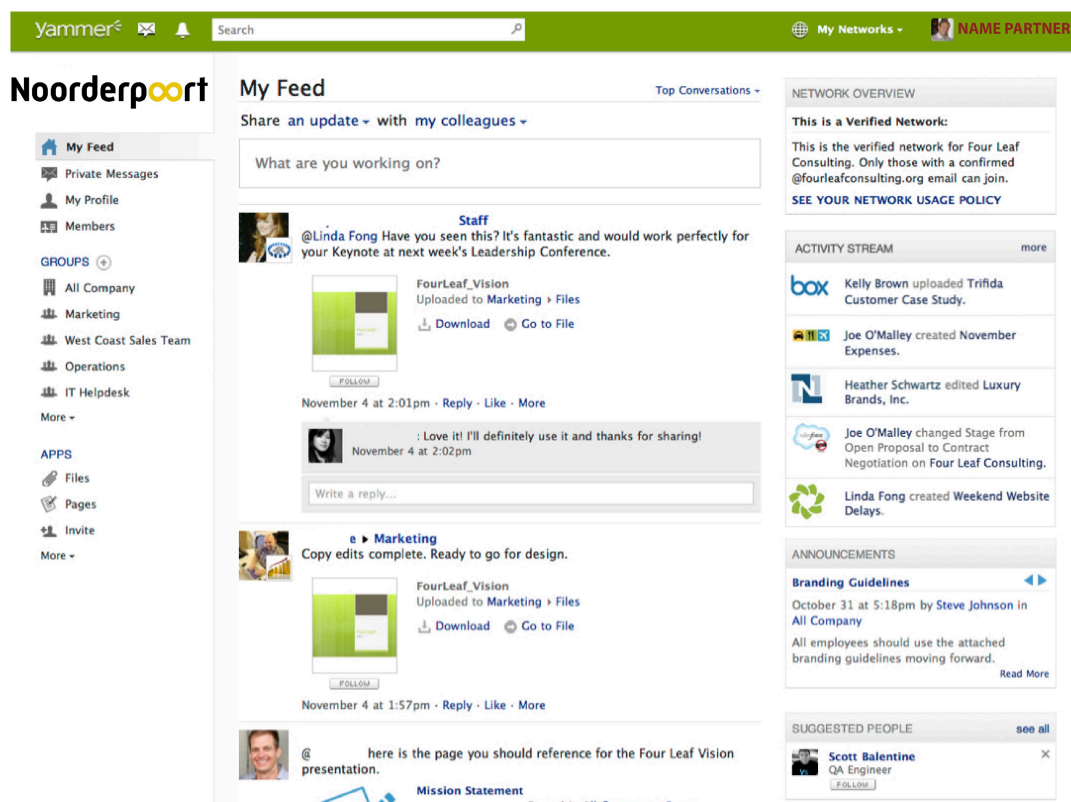


The theoretical research knowledge management provided an overview of the benefits of knowledge sharing and its beneficial service to improve organizational learning (Blundel & Ippolito, 2008). Research objects have confirmed that they would like to increase the knowledge exchange among partners in order to enable increased learning (Appendix B). Recommendations were made that the frequency of interaction needs to be made consistent and this the goal of the 'yellow pages' tool will be a usage of the partners on a weekly/biweekly basis. The facilitator will be the intern at Noorderpooort and thus a strong focus will be to encourage the active participation on the platform. 'yellow pages' is a tool or platform, especially useful to share tacit knowledge. In order to incorporate all three tools into each other, the 'yellow pages' site will be furthermore used to work with the outcome of the team building exercises as well as the survey. The idea is to provide a modern directory of the partners in the region. Partners can create their own profile, comparable to social networks, such as Facebook. Important factors to name and mention per partner are given in the following list.

Relevant fields to be included in the yellow pages per partner:

- Name
- Job title
- Organization
 - A brief job description of the job position and experience in the field
 - Professional qualification (optional)
 - CV (optional)
- Past projects & experiences
- Current projects
- Future projects (optional)
- List of partnerships and networks active in
- Areas of interest in the professional field
 - Pre-defined list of key terms
- Contact information
 - Online and Offline
- Personal information (optional)
- Profile photo (optional)

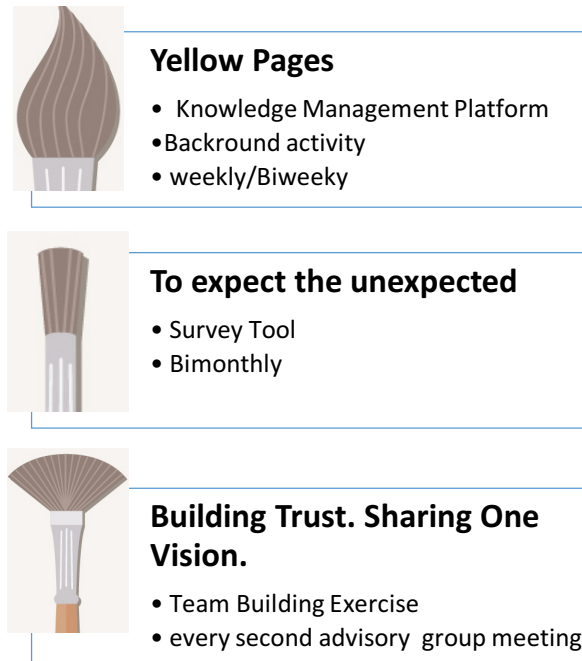
The participation of the 'yellow pages' site is voluntary and thus the promotion of the benefits of the side among partners is essential to ensure their usage. Referring back to the research outcome, it can be said that the tool will stimulate the dimension of power (Turker, 2014) and ensure the quality of every individual on the platform. The tool will create a sense of personal responsibility, as usage of several users of the platform will lead to a group reaction, in which everyone wants to share information. The difference between part-time active partners and full-time active partners will furthermore not be given, as the individuals on the platform have the room to share their perspective and experience. They can react and comment on experiences of partners, even when they themselves have nothing to share. Graphic 2 on page 43 exemplifies the layout of such a social network. Yammer serves as the chosen internet service to use for the implementation of this advice (Yammer, n.a.). The service provides easy access and a clear overview of the page in order for the user to navigate through it.



Graphic 2: Example of yellow pages

The team building exercises documentation will be uploaded and maintained by the intern. On that basis of the materials interactions can be fostered and thus relationships can be strengthened.

7.2. Implementation Plan



Graphic 3: 'Tool Box – 3 in 1' Overview

7.2.1. Milestones & Monitoring

In order to enable a clear and realistic implementation of the 'Tool Box – 3 in 1' a plan has been created according to 6 milestones. The plan is to be implemented as soon as an intern suitable for the position has been found and hired. The estimated time for the intern to start is the 1st August 2017. In order to ensure a successful implementation, the intern will be focused on fulfilling the position and its responsibilities solely in the first month. Consequently, the beginning of the 6 milestone steps will begin on the 1st September 2017. It must be said that the beginning time the implementation is flexible, if applied to the whole inter-organizational cooperation in the Ems Dollard Region. However, if a test run is conducted on the example of the ICT excellence program, then the 1st September 2017 is the ideal start date of the initiative, as the traineeships of the students will begin in the same time and the interest of the partners into the cooperation will be at the highest point. A schematic representation of the 6 step plan will be provided in Table 1 on page 46.

Step 1

- The intern will be introduced to the advice and implementation plan
- Responsibilities are implemented to act as a facilitator, researcher and administrator of the 'Tool Box – 3 in 1' tools are to be explained

Step 2

- A set of team building exercises is to be researched and prepared on the basis of the preparation plan provided in 7.1.1.

- The necessary materials are to be gathered and created to ensure smooth first exercise
- The intern is to take photos and videos to use as content for the 'yellow pages' tool

Step 3

- Create content and layout for the 'yellow pages'
- The first team building exercise takes place at the advisory meeting. The tool box as a whole will be presented and room for questions will be given to ensure that all partners are comfortable to use the tools
- The acquired content of the team building exercise has to be added to the 'yellow pages'

Step 4

- The survey tool is to be drafted according to the description given in 7.1.2.
- Emails with the survey link in it are to be send out to the partners
- Evaluating data outcome of the survey
- Creating a section in the 'yellow pages' to add data outcome
- Begin to actively foster the interaction of the partners, by becoming active as the facilitator in the 'yellow pages'

Step 5

- Regularly send out Emails and attending meetings to remind the partners of the new tools
- Fostering participation of partners online and offline
- Ensure that formal and informal information are shared, hence project related documents and personal experiences from the project or other topic related experiences

Step 6

- Give weekly feedback on interesting participations of partners and share them, hence reward participation
- Monitor the success of the initiatives and make changes accordingly
- Request feedback of partners about the implemented initiative, whilst monitoring the response willingness of the partners

The monitoring of the aforementioned steps is of key importance to the success of the communication intervention. The active participation and interaction of partners by using the presented tools is crucial in order to guarantee success. The final steps of the plan (Step 5 & 6) are of utmost importance to be monitored and executed successfully. The given milestones and goals will enable the intern to determine the monitor the implementation process. The satisfaction of the partners about the initiatives is thus of primary importance. In the following chapter (7.2.2.) the planning a deadlines of the described milestones will be presented.

7.2.2. Planning

The 6 steps described above can be found color coded in the schematic representation of the implementation plan. Instead of dates, time frames are given to show the process over time. Steps described in 7.2.1. are found below. Step 1 is the introduction of the intern to the tasks and responsibilities to implement the given advice. Step 2 is the preparation and execution of the (7.1.1.) team building exercise tool. Step 3 is the creation and implementation of the 'yellow pages' tool, including the maintenance with input from the exercises as well as the survey. Step 4 is the creation of the survey tool, including data analysis. The crucial stages of the implementation plan are Step 5 & 6 as evolve around mobilizing the partners to participate and use the provided tools.

Step 1	Step 1				
	Step 2	Step 2			
		Step 3	Step 3	Step 3	
			Step 4	Step 4	
		Step 5	Step 5	Step 5	Step 5
				Step 6	Step 6
Week 35	Week 36	Week 37	Week 38	Week 39	Week 40

Table 1: Schedule implementation communication plan

7.2.3. Budget

The milestones and planning have been discussed in section 7.2.1. In personal communication with the client, Minke Kloppenburg, it was established that the budget to solve the communication problem at hand is to be kept at a minimal. The main resource of the inter-organizational cooperation are funds from various projects. It was explained that funds can be granted if the test run of the 'Tool Box – 3 in 1' proves to be successful in practice. The project context gives insight into the factors influencing inter-organizational cooperation. Costs are being saved by making use of existing communication structures or free online tools.

Expenses			
Student Intern Communication	400 EUR per month	6- month internship	2000 EUR
Material costs or exercises	40 EUR per exercise	3 exercises (every 2 months)	120 EUR

Travelling costs to meetings with partners	30 EUR per drive	Approximately 200 km each trip (3 trips total)	90 EUR
Total expenses			2210 EUR
Revenue			
Profit from tools	0 EUR		
Funding through new effective partnerships	Approximately 7000 EUR	1 or several partners	7000 EUR
Total Revenue			7000 EUR
Balance expenses and revenue		+	4790 EUR

Table 2: Budget

7.3. Conclusion

The communication problem is to be solved by using the 'Tool Box – 3 in 1' to improve the inter-organizational communication between the partners in the EDR. The deliverables, (1) team building exercises, (2) survey tool as well as (3) yellow pages lead up to achieve that goal by touching on important aspects of the research findings. The key concepts of the theoretical research areas enabled to unravel sources of barriers and success in communication, which are taken into account in the formulation of the 'Tool Box – 3 in 1'. The motto's *'Building trust. Sharing one vision.'*, *'To expect the unexpected'* and *'We know more than we can tell'* are guiding the tools and thus stress the most important aspects that became evident in the findings of the research. *'Building trust. Sharing one vision.'* Focuses on establishing trust in the team in order to ensure that the inter-organizational relationship improve. Followed by *'To expect the unexpected'*, a survey tool to foster the exchange of opinion, expectations, frustrations as well as success. Lastly, *'We know more than we can tell'* is the motto leading the tool yellow pages to show that there is room to express and share between the partners in order to increase the effectiveness of the communication.

7.3.1. International Relevance

Noorderpoort's goal is to increase its performance through inter-organizational cooperation, with a focus in international cooperation. The partnership with organizations in the Ems Dollard Region is thus of great importance to the organization. The work is primarily international and thus the international relevance is dominant in this work. Improving the effectiveness of the intercultural communication with the given partners in the EDR will lead to knowledge that can be applied to further international partnerships of Noorderpoort.

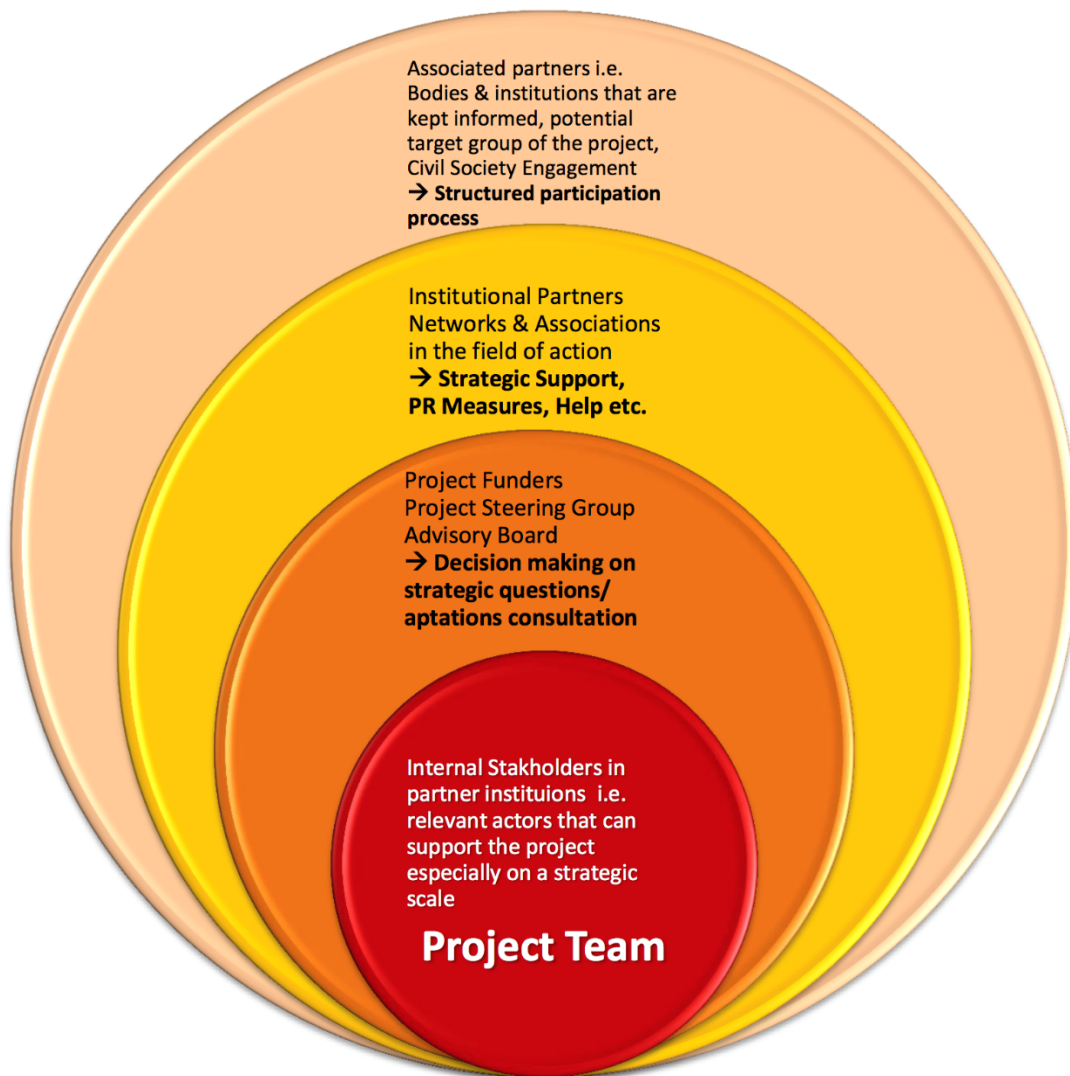
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Appendix A – Preliminary Research

1.1. Stakeholder group



Graph 4: (pat-tein, 2012)

1.2. Pilot Project Technik 3

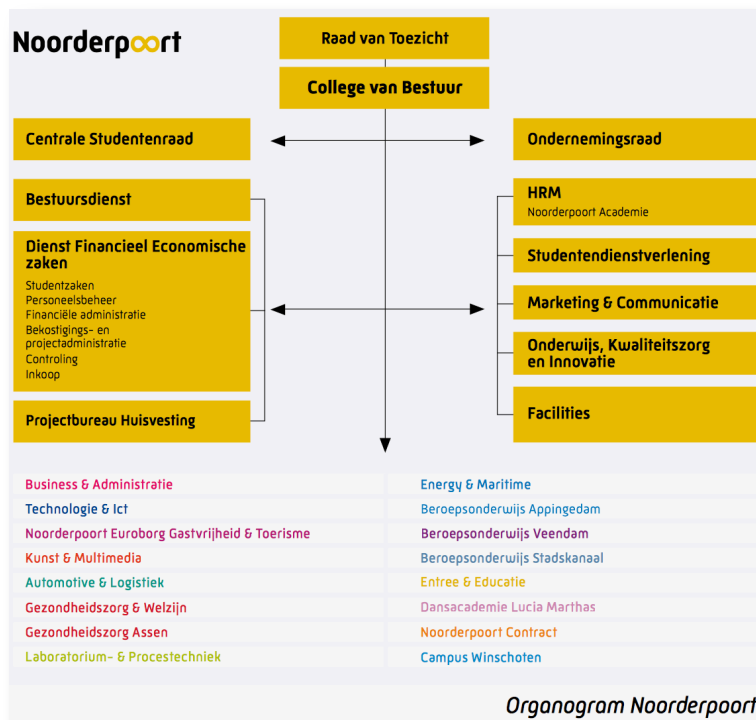
The pilot project 'Technik 3' took place in connection with the engineering faculty. Noorderpoort cooperated with German partners and introduced a test trainee program for engineering students. The project failed and was discontinued due to several reasons. The reasons were analyzed and summarized in an evaluation report (Technik 3 Report). The report analyzed the aspects of (1) working cross-culturally, (2) the possibilities and limitations of the labor market in the Ems Dollard Region, (3) project organization and communication as well as (4) aspects of the execution for students, the traineeship companies, teachers as well as other stakeholders. The conclusions drawn from the evaluation report are listed in the table below. The preliminary research scan of the failed pilot project shows that the root of the problem lays in the communication of the project management team and how the planning was communicated to the remaining stakeholders (see 3.2. of the table below). Furthermore, a strong tendency in all 4 categories can be seen that the problems are based in intercultural sensitivity, hence a problem with intercultural communication.

<u>Category</u>	<u>Conclusions</u>
(1)Working cross-culturally	Influences of both cultures are valued
	The Dutch are more informal
	Structures and hierarchy are more evident in Germany
	Safety regulations are strict in Germany
	The Dutch are unorganized and have less structure
	The Dutch are flexible, however Germans have clear rules of responsibility and obligations
(2)Possibilities and limitations of the	A shared labor market has benefits for stakeholders of both countries
Labor market in the Ems Dollard Region	Dutch & German stakeholders are aware of the given value and benefits of the traineeship program
	The Dutch students are aware of the labor market necessity for them in Germany, however also stress that with less effort they can complete traineeships in the Netherlands.
(3)Project organization and communication	No clear agreement/understanding was given about the project organization and communication

	Clear agreements on responsibility at the management level were missing leading to problems in execution on the lower levels
	A communication plan was missing, guiding the stakeholders on how information is shared
	Evaluation meetings and project meetings were missing
	Logbooks and feedback from consultations was missing
	Too many intermediaries were active in the project
	Too many actions were based on assumptions
	Intercultural differences in communication need to be taken into consideration
	External parties need to be given handled with more care and focus
	Many expectations were not addressed or shared, leading to frustration
(4) Aspects of the execution for students,	The selection of participating students' needs to be more strict
The traineeship companies, teachers as well as other stakeholders	Awareness of the consequences of a dual system in Germany, in contrast to the Netherlands, is not high enough among Dutch students
	Agreements are not clear between teachers, traineeship companies, students and project management
	A lack of intercultural awareness is given among students and needs attention in form of an intercultural training
	All parties involved need intercultural training
	Differences in students coming from different Dutch school need to be taken into account
	Communication between different students from different schools needs to improve

Table 3: Evaluation Report Analysis

1. 3. NP Profile

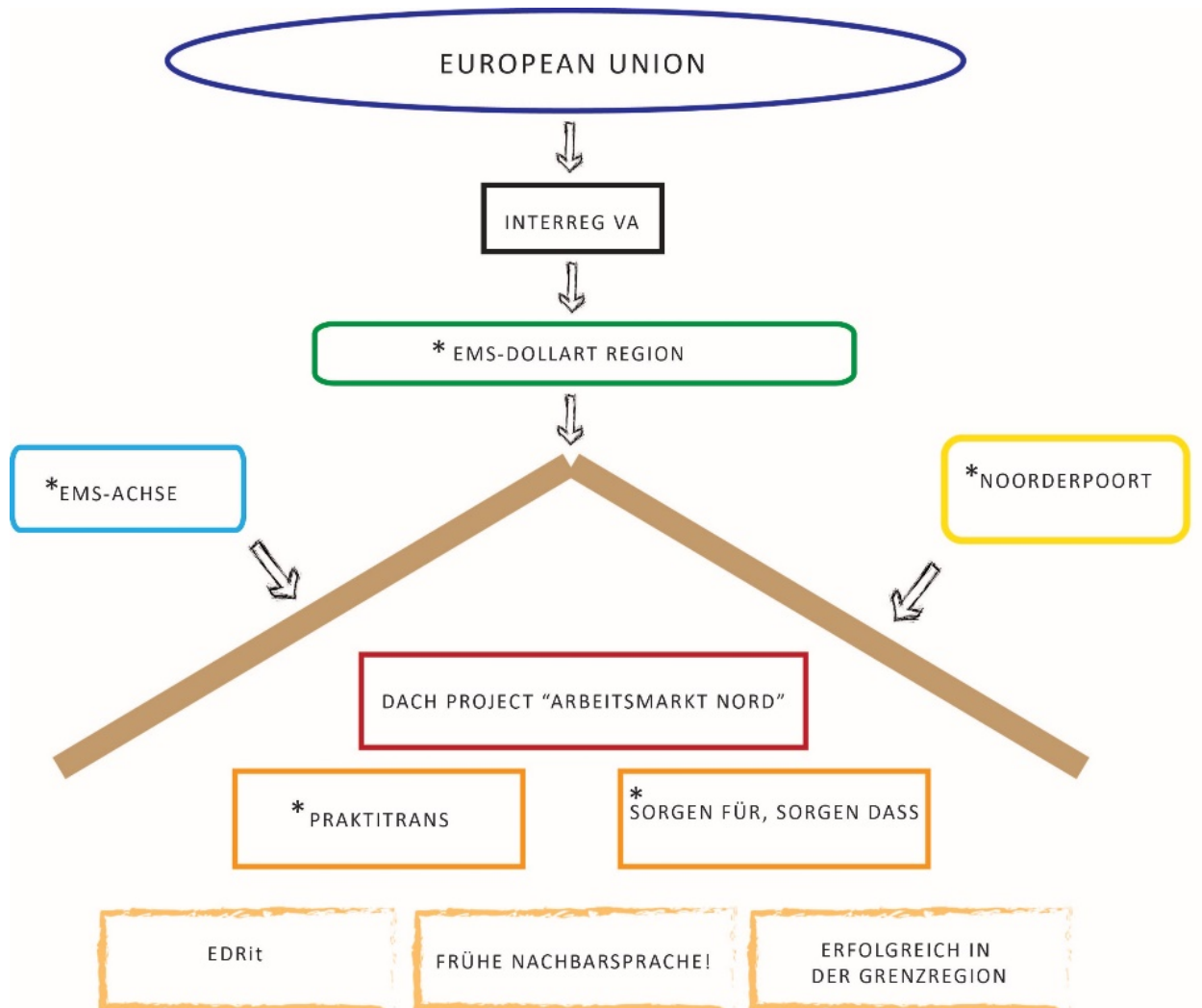


Graph 5: Organizational Structure (Jaarverslag Noorderpoort 2015)

Graph 1 shows the organizational structure of NP and its departments. The relevant stakeholders for this research are students and employees of Gezondheidszorg & Welzijn (Health & Care), Technologie & ICT (Engineering & ICT) and Gastvrijheid & Toerisme (Hospitality & Tourism).

Furthermore, the NP staff designing, organizing and implementing international projects are essential in the context of the research.

1.4. Inter-organizational network



Graph 6: self-created

1.4.1. List of Partners and Projects

Partner & Description Projects	
Netwerk ZON (<i>Netwerk voor zorg-welzijnopleidingen</i>)	The Noorderpoort is collaborating for over 15 years in the network ZON with the Alfa-College, Drenthe College and ROC Menso Alting (NetwerkZON, 2016).
Ems Achse	The growth-region Ems-Achse is a network of about 490 members. 6 competency domains are fostered by several companies and organizations on a voluntary basis to enable projects (EmsAchse, n.d.)

Ems Dollard Region	The Ems Dollard Region (EDR) defines the Northern region of the German and Dutch border. In 1977 the EDR was founded and aims at enhancing the cross boarder connection, cooperation and build a network for the future. It is part of the INTERREG program of the European Union and financially supported (Arbeitsmarkt Nord, n.d.).
<i>Dachproject</i> <i>“Arbeitsmarkt Nord”</i>	The project entails several focus points, (1) Labor demand of enterprises (2) Labor supply / unemployment, (3) Mobility of employed persons and (4) Development of a cross-border training market. The development of a cross-border training market is the focus of NP and this research assignment (Arbeitsmarkt Nord, n.d.).
<i>Praktitrans</i>	Commenced in July 2016 the 2-year program Praktitrans, belonging under the overall project ‘Dach Project’ of the Ems Dollard Region has been active to foster exchange between the labor markets (EmsAchse, n.d.).
<i>Sorgen für Sorgen, dass (SFSD)</i>	The focus of the project is directed at schools, apprenticeship institutions, students, nursing organizations as well as job seekers in the North German region as well as Groningen. The project commenced end of May 2016. 400 students of each respective country takes part in the exchange annually. (Arbeitsmarkt Nord,n.d.)

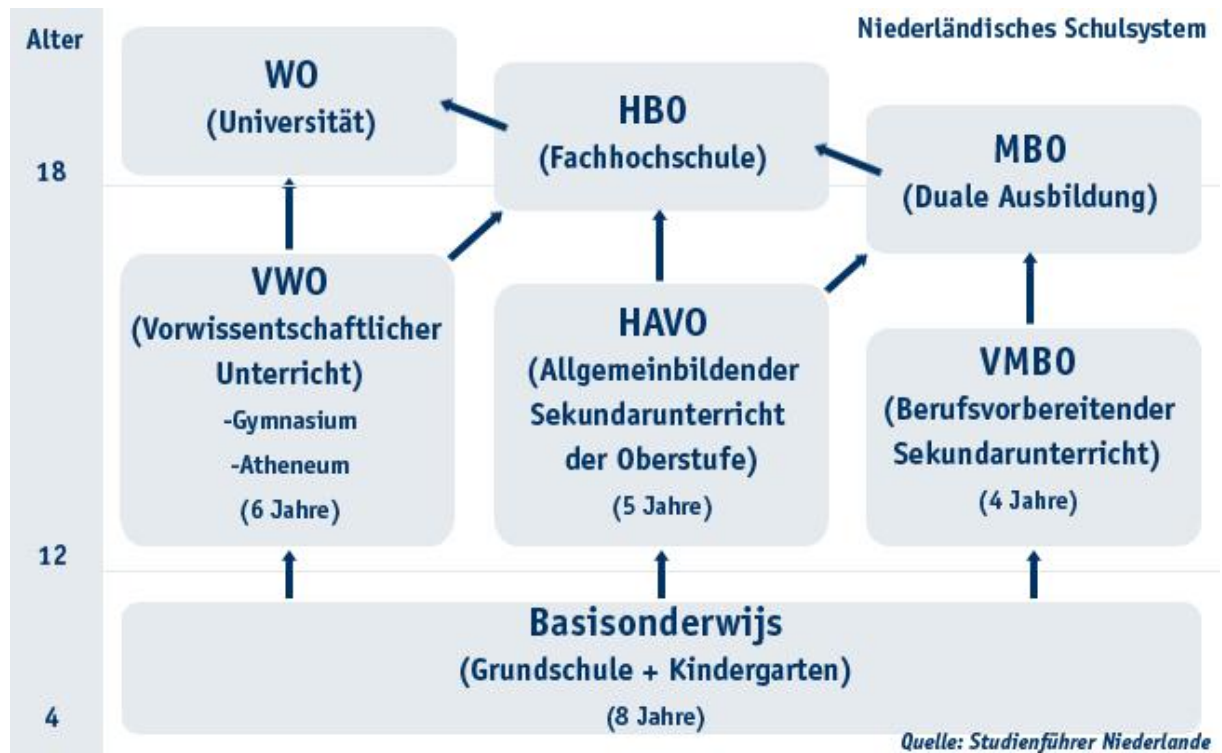
Table 4: List of Partners and Projects

1.4.2. List of Research Objects

Project	Contact	Nationality	Email	Invitation sent	Interview Date
SFSD	1. Anneke Bosch	NL	A.Bosch@drenthe.nl	24.4.	11.5
Praktitrans	2. Jule Tirrel	GER	tirrel@emsachse.de	24.4.	5.5.
	3. Caroline Wille	GER	caroline.wille@stenden.com	24.4.	3.5.
Dachproject	4. Michiel Malewicz	NL	michiel.malewicz@edr.eu	24.4.	3.5.
	5. Ilona Heijen	GER	ilona.heijen@edr.eu	24.4.	4.5
Technik 3	6. Daniela Saadhoff	GER	Daniela.Saadhoff-Waalkens@leewerk-wisa.de	24.4	10.5

Table 5: List of Research Objects

1.5. Educational System Dutch/German



Graph 7: Education System Dutch/German

Appendix B – Interviews

1. Interview EDR - Arbeitsmarkt Nord

Interviewee: Michiel Malewicz Interviewer: Vivienne Duensing 3 May 2017 at 9.00 Phone interview Groningen, Netherlands 43 min
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Graph 8: Interview EDR – Arbeitsmarkt Nord

Interview Transcript

V: Please briefly describe your job position and your role within the cross-border projects.

M: Together with Ilona Heijn, we are project managers for the project 'Arbeitsmarkt Nord', hence responsible to proceed and develop all kinds of projects, belonging to create at the end one labor and educational market across the border region, Ems Dollard Region. I am partially working for the project as a project manager and half of my time I am an advisor for the Grensinfpunt. It is a cross-border point where cross-border workers can ask anything they need to know and to make sure that the German or Dutch side is proceeding according to plan, or at least know what kind of personal information they need to know to make that happen. That is what my role basically is in this organization.

V: To confirm, this means a 50/50 balance of your project work and the advisory work?

M: Yes, in the end it's a crossing within the project. The Arbeitsmarkt Nord project is the overhead project underneath there are several building bricks, they are all connected and have a focus on a specific theme or subject, but the end focus is to create one labor market connected with the educational market within our cross-border region. That's the main focus.

V: How long have you been in this position and how much experience do you have in cross-border projects?

M: I fulfill my current position since January 2016, so nearly 1.5 years. Before that I have been working as an advisor in the cross border market in the southern part of the Netherlands and their communication was focused on Dutch and Belgium cross-border work. In total that goes back about 10 years, that I am working the cross-border areas.

V: Describe to me the general project communication, ideally name the most relevant steps.

M: The organization of the project is build up that we (Ilona Heijn) fulfill the project management but at the end we are not the only ones working on the projects. It's necessary that the information and the ideas, suggestions to create such a cross border market, comes from

underneath, from several parties within the projects. To make sure there is a schedule, so called meet up. That is a format in which several experts from the region are meeting. That is a setting we have created to make sure that information knowledge and experience is shared within those working group. Above that is a so called 'Beirat' or advice group, who decide at the end to approve the project proposal or not. This is a project for a certain theme, the budget is built up around many financial components and we as an advising group decide or approve that suggested project proposal. Then the lead partner of each initiated project can start directly to proceed with the outcome and the development of the project process. So you have the project management, you have the advising group and you have the working group. Those 3 are the instruments in which we meet, communicate and share the knowledge and the experience side of the countries but also from several layers within the region. Examples are 'Landkreise' are involved, provinces are involved, but also Agentur für Arbeit and all those companies are involved. In that way we try to improve that project ideas are shared and also that everybody knows what is happening and also to make sure that no one is developing something that does not yet exist somewhere else, which is also the focus of our project management.

V: Do I understand it correctly, that it seems important to have transparency in the projects?

M: Yes, that's very important. And the experience that these experts have, like the meeting you (Vivienne Duensing) have attended, also know that there are a lot of things happening in the region and of course we try to overview it but we don't know all, so therefore we would like to share these knowledge and experiences from either the attending parties to make sure that experiences on how to develop certain projects or to solve certain issues are shared as well. The positive effects of course are very important to share the success to share and of course also the things that didn't go well, to know that there is a certain area or projects where we came across a certain issue and in the next step other projects can learn from those experiences. Also to make sure that the evolving projects therefore improve and therefore this is the easiest way to connect and to make projects possible.

V: Please name your personal experiences with miscommunication, maybe you have moments in mind where miscommunication took place or there was room for improvement.

M: I believe in general, that is also one of our main goals of our complete project, we try to differ or change the mindset of people living in the border region, a lot of people are only focused on the side of the side of the border which they are living in, so if you live in the Netherlands than you only have those chances and possibilities in mind that you normally come across upon, but you are not open minded for others that are 10 km away across the border. All this negative problem issues and experiences, they are the ones who are mostly been shared, instead of the positive experiences while of course daily there are thousands of people crossing the border to work or study on the other side, with a lot of fun and nice

experiences. Not always successful, but in life not everything is successful but you learn from it and that's making you a better person, that's at least my personal believe. I would say that the focus in communication is too much on the negative, 'How can we solve the problem'. 'what can we do to make it easier during regulation point of view', instead of focusing on all those people, students and companies who have a lot of chances in this region. General that is the communication focus in our region. Within the project, I believe, that the beginning of the project is always to get to know each other, like a network, you have to start somewhere and then you have to build together to make a start and the main advantage is to start a project in the beginning is to have a clean sheet. In that way it is easier to learn from each other and to have respect for each other as well as learn from each other's opinion and then there is room also to give specific outcomes, especially for communication and open mind and focus is very important, because otherwise you can't proceed in a project or you can't get things done together. This leads to something being solved in a Dutch point of view, but the German side sees it as a Dutch solution, so for their perspective it may not be such a good solution and you have to make sure that such processes are done together and from the start and not half way you present an outcome that is irreversible, that's very important.

V: Where in the different steps of your project planning would you say is it most difficult to build a bridge between German and Dutch viewpoints? Or do you think it is generally the same?

M: No it is not always the same and it is not always difficult. However, the main thing is that a lot of things are also focused on the differences between the networking partners and the companies on the other side of the border, instead of focusing on the things that you have in common. There are things that we have in common, that we know but somehow it is always easier to focus on the difference instead of the common things. In the steps of the preparing of an initiative or project proposal, it can come from either side of the network or within the project itself, from experts or partners, they can sit together and think, 'ok we have a chance or a problem here in this or this step or with these steps we can solve it or improve the region for the connection between students and the companies in the region'. Whatever theme you use, they start together and they start writing a proposal, but to make it concrete and do make sure that the outcome is the same and everybody is happy with it, that is something that needs time. Important is that you need to know each other and then you can work together but it is not at all times, but you need to build together to extend the working possibilities. You need positive people, within your working groups to look at the positive aspects in order to come further. You need people who are very enthusiastic about the cross-border idea, to create such a region together and then you can start focus on how can we proceed and how can we achieve certain goals. For example, Minke Kloppenburg, she is very enthusiastic and has an open mind to make a change in the projects and those are the type of people we are in need of.

V: Would you say that there is a shared vision or shared goal for what the project partners want to achieve? Do you feel like that is given? Or do you feel like that varies from partner to partner?

M: Everybody has that goal, somewhere and somehow. But I think that is something to be improved as well, to be more commonly shared and to have one strip on the horizon to go through and very important within our project is that we focus not only finding a solution but would like to create long term projects for a long term period and so that takes time and you need people and also the commitment of companies and governments to have the time and the awareness that it takes time. That is sometimes a complex balance. You are using European and regional money and of course it needs to be proven or you need certain numbers that you need to achieve. And if you don't reach these numbers then it is difficult to explain the success of a project, if you don't have statistics proving it. And then it is important that you have people in the projects who see the bigger picture, and then I think most partners within our projects are also there because they have that brought mindset but of course everybody has their own responsibilities and the need to share and show their personal or organizational reason why they are attending such projects. That is always a different aspect and to have room for such personal or organizational standing points to make sure everyone can have small success, as long as it is the success of the complete project than it is of course no problem. But to answer your question, I think they have the same goal but at the end that can be improved as well and therefore examples like the white book or positive quotes of people to make it more visible and that people know what is happening also for people outside of the project room so to say, they need to see what happens there as well, that is something that can be improved communication wise I believe. To create a greater group feeling, that is something that is there but it is something that you have to invest in continuously, so you cannot be satisfied with that anytime.

V: How do you measure the success of a project for yourself?

M: Every project has of course their own output indicator and sometimes its statistical and sometime it is more focused on the mindset and the experience sharing, given with the example of Sorgen für, Sorgen dass (SFSD), it is a big project, that focuses of course on students from the health care studies to experience a part of their study, like a traineeship, instead of doing that all in the Netherlands or all in Germany, they are for a couple of months a 'Praktikum' within a health care institute right across the border. The experience of those students is a nice thing to have and also to see what are nice things to do, and in the end to make sure that they have this experience that's something that is difficult to measure if you look at the numbers in total, over 200 students a course or internship in healthcare institutions in Germany, those 200 are of course a very big number, but if you compare it to the total number of students in the Netherlands, then the 200 is not as big of a picture. Together with

Ilona I have always tried to build something together, starting small and then becoming bigger like a snowball. So it extends because of the success and experience. Do within the small steps of the healthcare projects, it is nice experience for the students and others involved, as they are all experiencing new possibilities on the other side of the border, which is very worthwhile.

V: What in your experience has proven to be a good strategy to find common ground with other project partners?

M: The problem, as I mentioned before, is that you have the room for differences and that you are aware of the cultural differences, as small or big they are, that does not need to be a problem when you work together, as long as you know about the cultural difference. German colleagues are proceeding differently with steps than for instance the Dutch colleagues. As long as you know from each other that you have to deal with these steps maybe differently than there is room for a difference and then you can cooperate together. Also, in general, the common things that everybody knows about, the typical Dutch or the typical German differences can be a problem but also handy to create things that you couldn't come up with your own colleagues. For instance, the Dutch are said to be very creative, direct and fast forward, but if you only have those together the basis of what you build upon may not be so solid. It can be a good combination but must not always be so. Of course, it's like a cliché and not everybody has the same way of working and in Germany, at least we experience it, that there is a new generation in place as well and they are not so bureaucratic and they are also being more direct. Those old school differences are, as long as you work together, getting smaller. I believe that is a nice experience as well.

V: Would you describe in the relationship with your project partners, that there is such a thing as a hierarchy between? For instance, between experienced and in-experienced partners?

M: Very important for us is, that everybody is equal and also has room to speak out whatever they think that is important. So at the end there is no hierarchy. Together with Ilona, we are responsible for the project management. So if there needs to be something decided, then in the end we need to decide it. For example, the 'Lenkungsgruppen' meeting last week, there was a proposal presented by us to the group and we as for input or suggestions to make it better. Also, to ask for the opinions and experience, can it be approved or not. If it is not agreed upon than we see why someone is not agreeing with it or why somebody is asking certain questions. Than we have a look at it and then there is room to make sure that this is dealt with. Than this input is also processed in the project proposal. Everybody's input is very important and in that way there is no hierarchy and the Dutch and the Germans are equal in that way. And specifically, we would like to create one region and then it is a necessity that you maintain that in the project as well.

V: How would you estimate the level of motivation to be creative or to be innovative in the project partner team?

M: As long as the creativity adds to the project and benefits it in a broader picture, than you can't be creative enough I would say. The ideas, however, need to be possible to be put into place to work with them as well and in some point of the project step you have to say ok, all these ideas are great and we can get them along the way maybe processed as well, but we have to start somewhere and then you have an overview of what can be done at a certain time to see that you can achieve your goals. Also, you need to be focused and aware of the work that is involved in achieving your goals and then you need to be aware of the time everybody has, to only talk about the ideas you won't get anywhere or anything done. Creativity is very important to deal with certain issues or problems you may come across, so how can we deal with this, is there a possibility to look up other parties that we haven't thought of. But also from a practical and very straight forward way and not a higher educational proposal way. To connect things that haven't been before is very important. And I would say that everybody in its own way adds to that process.

V: How do you feel you use technology in the general project communication to its full potential?

M: We have of course all these new technical possibilities and we can use the, but our experience for instance, we have a website from Arbeitsmarkt Nord, in which we have a private section for project partners only, where project related documents are being shared as well. The experience shows that a lot of attending partners only print and take the documents that have been emailed to them. Therefore, we stopped using that possibility. If you have to get your information in that hidden or special section, no one is using it. Email is a common communication instrument of course and besides that we have the website on which we post small articles or pictures of a meeting from students, such things are being shared via the website. We have twitter and Facebook as well, but that could be used more often. We have a new communication colleague starting here next week and can focus more on that aspect. But in the end no, there are some new technologies that we can use but the experience is also that the old school things work very well and efficient. Therefore, we try to keep it as easy as possible. We have a newsletter in which we describe some processes as well.

V: Would you say that you talk on a regular basis also on the phone with your project partners?

M: Personal meetings are very important, most information goes via Email, before and after the meetings. Beside that we have personal contact via phone as well, sometimes it's more easy and efficient to reach a person directly. Not just to achieve something but to attend to the relationship as well. Something that you have to maintain. In Email it is very difficult to nuance things. In text everybody can read it in their own way.

V: What is in your opinion most relevant to be in the 'White Book'? What themes needs to be covered? What is your vision?

M: In my opinion, that is basically what we have been discussing previously, you see very personal practical overview of the things that are being developed here, and not the projects itself but the outcome of the projects. For example, the health care projects, if the students saying something about their own personal experience, project partners are saying something about her experience. Than you have the host company who can share their experience. When you have an overview within the so called white book, the cross border workers can share their experiences. Making a good picture in front of its company, then it makes it personal and reachable to be part of a project. That is something we would like to develop. Also, to have a positive picture of things happening in this region, instead of all the negative and the problem differences that you come across upon very much. Something nice can be done here in the region, I think that you can proof or show that to people, actually living in this region, to show them the benefits of the projects that we develop. The students who are now attending from Winschoten are now attending a 6-month traineeship at IT companies in Leer. They are enthusiastic and they have been offered a job after their traineeship. Those persona quotes and developments are very helpful and worthwhile and valuable to use those practical examples. It doesn't have to always be a positive PR, propaganda, no it's a real time life thing and to see how people are dealing with these issues. That is something we would like to have in that White Book. A real overview of what is happening. People in real life, instead of text and pictures. Also quotes from students who voice their trouble from the beginning but show that at the end it was all worth it. Showing their pride to have achieved something and managed it. To show that these possibilities are in this short distance region and there are nice experiences to make. Not that you are off to study and move and you think the only thing that I can do is in Amsterdam or Berlin. No in your region where you live, there are nice things to experience.

V: Would you like to add anything?

M: Yes, to just have an overview of the things we have in common instead of the differences. That is maybe a nice perspective in your investigation, instead of the differences. The shared values. That is maybe easier to focus in communication as well, than on the differences.

2. Interview Praktitrans

Interviewee: Caroline Wille Interviewer: Vivienne Duensing 3 May 2017 at 12.30 phone interview Groningen, Netherlands 30 min

Graph 9: Interview Praktitrans

Interview Transcript

V: Please describe your job position and your role in the cross-border projects.

C: I am employed at Stenden, the university, for German/Dutch cooperation's and student related matters with the interest of the university on a cross-border basis. Currently I am working for the Reijnland Institute and that is a cooperation between Stenden, ALFA (college), Drente college and currently the Hanze University is debating about joining and the Fachhochschule Osnabrück. For them I also work for the cooperative part for projects, student talks, marketing. Basically I do everything, as long as it is related to German/Dutch cooperation.

V: How much work experience do you have in the cross-border work?

C: I have participated in various projects of Stenden and have been employed by them since 2011.

V: Just to clarify, you do marketing, project work and management in the projects?

C: I do marketing, internally for Stenden, for example to introduce German students to the Dutch study courses. Another example, the project Praktitrans, there my task was to write the Marketing plan.

V: Are you part of other Dachprojects, next to Praktitrans?

C: Currently only Praktitrans.

V: Please describe to me the communication and in specific the communication steps in a cross border project?

C: Within Praktitrans is the communication for me personally informal, because I am not only in the 'Lenkungsgruppe' but also in the operative group, hence I also execute. Therefore, I have only short interactions with the closest contact partner. An example is that not always an address is given at the beginning of an Email. When you are operatively employed than you are constantly communicating as you are communicating to various companies and organizations, all having various different working hours. Some of them also have other employments or tasks, making them work only part time or less on cross border projects. It is

therefore also partially complicated to manage a large group of various stakeholders. It can be challenging to find a good communication path there.

V: As far as I understand it seems that there is not so much a structure in the communication then?

C: Yes, indeed, but more I would stress that the individuals have various needs you have to be aware of. For example, some like to email and some prefer a quick phone call. Something that doesn't work at all are conference calls, such as via Skype. The partners rather meet in person and drive through the region, instead of calling, which makes the communication in turn slower.

V: Could you please give examples of miscommunication within the cross-border project work?

C: Especially when you communicate via Email, then 'der Ton macht die Musik' (setting the tone). However, of course when you have been working with the same partners over years than you know each other and know how to work with that. Relationships are developed over a long period of time as you have constantly contact with the same people. You know how to communicate with people.

V: Please also specify on Dutch/German miscommunication.

C: Well, you have always certain expectations of what should be achieved or reached, namely a product or how a conversation should look like. That of course varies between a German and a Dutch. The Dutch are of course a lot more flexible however it is not in the nature of a German to be that flexible. More miscommunication takes place from the Netherlands to Germany than the other way around. That is because the Dutch are more open minded and are not stuck to their expectations as much, which in turn enables more qualitative work.

V: Could you please provide an example?

C: Yes, a marketing plan for example. In the Netherlands it is a lot less detailed and in Germany it tends to be a lot too detailed and planned. This comes down to the formulations and language used as well as the quantity, the amount of pages differs.

V: Would you say that there is a shared vision or goal on both sides of the border regarding the projects? And how that becomes visible in the projects?

C: I would say that the border is very open on both sides nowadays and it can be said that working across the border has become some sort of normal. On the projects there are mostly the same partners and it is rare that new faces appear, such as Jule. There are people who gain their first work experience and then there are people who have been doing it for over 30 years and know how the projects work. To come back to the expectations of partners to the projects, the Germans may have shared goals but don't necessarily use it in their daily life. For example, I am employed to foster the cross-border work and that is my job, but when I look at employees at municipalities, that they are working for that municipality and occasionally cross-border. They know and are aware how to work cross-border based, however approach it

differently as they don't work with it every day. You sense a difference there. In the first 1-2 meetings you can sense how everyone needs a bit to warm up and adapt to the new project and environment.

V: To paraphrase, you would not say that problems occur due to difference in expectations and goals as the cooperating partners have long lasting experience.

C: Yes, and I think with experience you develop a very high tolerance. In the Netherlands the tolerance level is by far higher, as in Germany you make a certain amount of mistakes and are out and no one wants to cooperate with you anymore.

V: How you evaluate the success of a project?

C: It is evaluated by the partners who fill out assessment forms and monitor them. If I only supervise a project than I can only delegate and command others to do things, hence I have to measure success by output indicators. This is due to the fact that those individuals have to travel a great of a distance. I, personally, have often the position in projects that I am acting as an operative partner. Therefore, my evaluation is much more soft, which are the human factors. I strongly believe that you can set as many output indicators as you want, if the executive and operative partners don't find common ground the project may achieve those goals, however the partners will not be content and satisfied. For me the greatest importance is that the project plan written has to match the goal of the people actually executing it. Of course I am working in the educational sector and therefore believe in the greater goal that people always need to learn something. There needs to be a sustainable benefit.

V: Please elaborate on how information is disseminated among project partners and whether or not you feel that you receive sufficient information about other projects?

C: Everyone who is involved in the area is most likely very included in the network and well informed. Of course you cross path with the same people repeatedly and then the same things are discussed. With me personally it is difficult to say, as I am partially active in the Ems Dollard Region organization as I am always on the lookout for new project, as that is my job. Therefore, I am well informed as I even know the projects who do not end up being executed. The ones who are actively involved with this, such as municipalities, organizations and such, who have an immense work load, they do not know about as many projects. If a company for example visits an event for a certain project, then you can be sure that they are largely uninformed about other projects. However, there are so called intermediaries who are always well informed about projects and I am for example in contact with such a person to always stay up to date about latest project proposals.

V: Do you see the necessity or room to improve this information system?

C: I do not believe it is possible to improve that system, even if you have a creative approach. Projects are largely complex and difficult to understand for people who are inexperienced with them. I am aware of that, as I notice it often when I try to explain my position to friends for

example and it is hard to grasp for people. People who have the need for these information, such as me who has to finance her position from it or municipalities who need the financial benefits from projects, then they will find them. On the other hand, companies do not necessarily need the information about projects, as they primarily pursue to do business and sell or provide services. The relevance of projects to them is limited to a bare minimum. They do not care or have an interest into projects, often the only reason they are willing to cooperate is a partners, such as me, pursued them long enough. They are only in need of projects who are relevant to them and those are brought to them by people like me. Therefore, providing that target group with newsletters, an information platform or press releases is largely not useful. You are aware of your network and in our case (Rijnland Institute) we have a 180 Degree radius German and a 180 Degree radius Dutch and then you also know what happens on the market.

3. Interview EDR – Arbeitsmarkt Nord

Interviewee: Ilona Heijn Interviewer: Vivienne Duensing 4 May 2017 at 9.00 phone interview Groningen, Netherlands 35 min

Graph 10: Interview EDR – Arbeitsmarkt Nord

Interview Summary

V: Please describe your position in the cross-border work.

- Project manager Arbeitsmarkt Nord, with Michiel
- Experience: since 2012

V: Please describe the communication between partners.

- Main importance is to build a strong network
- The structure within the Dachproject used to include several working groups and has been minimized to one
- The frequency of the meetings regularly, on average every 2 months
 - Official structure
 - Topics are project indicators, project proposals and the development of new projects
 - Also, evaluates newly proposed projects
- Advisory group
 - Financial successors, having final say for approval and monitor the financial progress
- Dachproject developed after the economic crisis
 - Need for cross-border exchange grew very fast and lead to a problem in oversight of several projects that started around the same time
 - The result was the development of an overall project, the Dachproject
- A strong focus for us is not to do anything double.
- Grenzpraxis – visit organizations and companies in the region and invite also the traineeships to it, about 15 people, several partners and the public can take part

- Supposed to activate people who usually do not have any connection to cross-border work

V: What do you believe to make it possible to bridge the geographic and contextual distance between project partners?

- The overall goal is to raise awareness
- Maintain structure in communication and especially networking
- Most importantly the personal action of the individual defines the success of a project
 - The interest
 - The language
 - The daily tasks of the individual influences the cross-border work and initiative
 - The broader goal of the project is at times matching on both sides of the *border* and at times it doesn't – that is also a variable of the success

V: Please give examples of miss-communication? Please differentiate between the different moments in the project work, beginning to end?

- Factors are language and openness
- Beginning phase of the project, due to the fact that trust and courage is lacking to ask questions and mention personal opinions
 - That is why it is relevant to have the same people on the table at the meetings
- The potential causes for miscommunication seem to be the lack of awareness for the cross-border project work and the lack of openness
- This shows why there are problems when there is turnover of staff
 - However generally it can be said that it is common that staff is well introduced to the job position
 - Overall there is a constant combination of the work based on experience in the work with stakeholders and the continuously changing network to adapt to modern changes

V: Do you believe there is a shared vision among project partners?

- First of all, a definition needs to be made, what kind of vision is talked about
- The broader, overall vision, is shared by all stakeholders – to create one region, bringing education and business together
- The differences appear in the Sub vision (goals) of the individual partners, as they all have different focus points and emphasis on for example students

V: Do you believe there to be a hierarchy among the project partners?

- Overall all partners are equal
- There is a system of lead partners and general partners, however this is a formal structure but does not lead to a hierarchy as such

V: Please describe the communication channels used between the project partners?

- Generally, the communication takes place via Email, telephone and face to face meetings
- There was a past proposal of a Wissensbank (comparable to a Wikipedia) of the projects in order to further strengthen the projects

V: How do you envision the so called 'White Book'?

- The target group should be the citizens in the region
- The content should be matching with the project goals – aiming at minimizing the border in the heads of the people
- The stress should be, not only to promote a one-way movement, but rather an exchange of German and Dutch parts equally
- The focus should be on the positive and not the negative
- It should visualize what is possible in the region
 - Based on what individuals share about what is possible

4. Interview Praktitrans

Interviewee: Jule Tirrel
Interviewer: Vivienne Duensing
5 May 2017 at 10.00
Personal interview
Papenburg, Germany
55 min

Graph 11: Interview Praktitrans

Interview Transcript

V: Please describe your job position and your role in the cross-border project(s).

J: My name is Jule Tirrel, I work for the Ems Achse for about 17-18 months now. I have written my Bachelor thesis here as well as completed an internship. I wrote about skilled Dutch workers in German businesses. Herewith also more about my background, I studied at the Hanze University of Applied Sciences in Groningen, learned Dutch there and entered the project through that, as it is related to the Dutch/German labour market. We, as the Ems Achse, are now doing the first cross border project, as the need has grown to connect and network, especially for the businesses in our region, which are in strong need of skilled staff. The step across the border to do 'Aufklärungsarbeit' (explanatory work or educational work) is the most reasonable action as the resources are close. I have been the project manager of the project Praktitrans, which started July 2016.

V: As you have studied at the Hanze University in the Netherlands, as a German, would you say that that international experience has prepared you or provided you with experience for the cross-border work?

J: Yes, for sure. You are deep in the Netherlands when you study in Groningen. You are in the middle of student life, get to know the typical things about Dutch students, for example that they are not always punctual, the grades are not that relevant, the key is to pass. That is kind of the contrary to how the Germans approach it, the experience I made is that they are more ambitious and focused on achieving high grades. When you work with Dutch students in project groups, you quickly notice that those aspects

can be problematic. Due to that, if I reflect on what the differences between the Netherlands and Germany are, it does not come to my attention straight away, as it has become normal to me, as I have lived and studied there for long. I don't think of the differences as differences as such, as both are normal to me. Most likely because I experienced it myself, there is a different awareness that certain factors are not that 'gravierend' (serious or severe).

V: Please describe your tasks and responsibilities in the project as project manager and describe the communication with the other project partners.

J: Sure, we have the 'Lenkungsgruppe' (steering group), in which all the financing partners are in, hence the ones who are a bit above the project and want to see results as they are co-financing the project. The Lenkungsgruppe is meeting once every quarter. It is my responsibility to organize and lead that meeting. Furthermore, to inform the partners, in between the meetings. Also, to communicate with the operative partners, who we try to meet with every 4 weeks, in order to monitor who does what, who approaches whom, which schools has been approached, which hasn't, which do we still have to contact, when did school visits take place or job busses. Basically to try and keep an overview, also to monitor that every operative partner is completing his/her tasks and responsibilities as well as to set goals. Generally, to keep everything together and to basically monitor constantly, to be able and establish if we have achieved our goals at the end of the project. In order to do so we need to continuously keep record, to be aware if we need to speed up towards the end of the project.

Also, I am at individual presentations, holding presentations. I am at many events in order to increase my network. For example, events organized by the EDR (Ems Dollard Region), in order to meet potential network partners, the idea to be at the events and be seen, especially that the public at large sees that there is a project out there. So that they realize, that there is someone active and at every event, to see the motivation and ambition, that is quite important.

V: So to repeat what you have said, for the Ems Achse as an organization this is the first cross-border effort and for you as a project manager this is your first work experience. Could you please elaborate on that, in the perspective of now being part of an experienced network?

J: In the beginning, of course it was really hard. I have had a colleague here at the Ems Achse who is Dutch, who was employed for another project which ended and then he began to write the project proposal for the now Praktitrans project. He would

always take me to events, he already had a network across the border, new the most people and introduced me, as a new employee who would now also work for the project. That was how I got to know all the people. You definitely notice that at many events you already know most of the people and then you use the events to maintain your contacts. However, on other events are you alone or lost, at least I have felt like that at times and then you are happy if you see a familiar face and then you go and talk to that person and he or she know of course others and then you get to know new people. Everyone introduces people to each other.

V: Picturing the beginning of the project and now do you see change in the way communication takes place now that you have established yourself in the network? Could you please elaborate on that?

J: Of course it was quite hard in the beginning to bring the project partners at one table. It was very hard to find one date on which everyone had time, in order to discuss how the project is to be kicked off, who an operative employee will be, that was only apparent in January 2017 (project start was July 2016). It was a long 'Findungsphase' (discovery phase). By now we have a good relationship to each other, in order to find dates to meet easier, also to satisfy the Lenkungsgruppe. You for example know now who doesn't answer emails often and take those things than into consideration when you plan the project.

V: Great. I would like to address the topic if miscommunication. Do situations come to mind which could be described as typical for miscommunication to appear? Please elaborate on that.

J: Yes, there is one example. It goes back to the beginning phase of the project (start July 2016) when the Dutch and of course also the German partners were requesting a marketing plan. It is of course a new project, for that you need to have a proper marketing plan to promote it and the documents for that need to be complete and sufficient to support it. The example was therefore that the Dutch partners said we have connections to experts who can work on that very well within 3 months. They said there would be first results after 6 weeks and they would start immediately, which was in December shortly before the Christmas holidays. Then I contacted the Dutch experts directly regarding the marketing materials, who gave me different information, which was that they wouldn't start till after Christmas due to the holidays. My thoughts were of course completely different, as I assumed that if they would start immediately, that that would also mean immediately and not after 2 weeks of vacation. But of course

with the perspective of being Dutch, there is just a different approach to time management.

V: Did you also make experiences with the problem that there are differences in using certain terms, for example the term 'Praktikum' or 'Diplom' in German translated into Dutch or English, is there at times confusion?

J: Could for sure, however within our project partners I cannot picture it, as everyone has been working on the cross-border basis for a long time. That is only an issue if you for example communicate with the German business, which you want to explain the program or traineeship experience for students. As they have no background information or previous experience with what a traineeship entails in the Netherlands. They for example assume at times that they have someone who is at the company and tacks along for 4 weeks and they have to entertain him/her. There is a difference for sure and you need to have the awareness that you need to clearly communicate at that point. But in the project group itself I cannot imagine no.

V: Would you say there is a specific phase of the projects in which it is more likely for miscommunication to occur?

J: For sure I would say the beginning phase of the project. It is very crucial at that time to set clear rules and guidelines to make sure that there is not too much room for interpretation or so. The marketing plan is relevant as everything is described in detail, like what channel is used when and what tool. What we have also noticed is that it is quite sensible to take minutes at the meetings of the Lenkungsgruppe, in order to be able to refer back to them if there are miscommunications.

V: How do you measure for you personally and on organizational level the success of a project?

J: In connection to Praktitrans is for me the priority of course to reach as many people as possible. Mainly to increase the interest of the students for a traineeship in Germany. There was one Job Bus that we were surprised by, the first one, in which the students didn't make the impression to be interested, as the tour took a long time and the German level wasn't the highest. They visited a company with the job bus and afterwards filled out a survey, marking that it is likely or highly likely that they want to complete a traineeship in Germany. This surprised us and showed us that the most important thing is to just make the students think about the possibility to go to Germany. The idea is to increase awareness and not only in the Netherlands among students but also in Germany. From the perspective of the Ems Achse, the success is of course

measured by referring to the set goals from the beginning of the project. Did we achieve all the goals or did we even outperform them, how successful was the collaboration? And what was the end result? Basically what you can quantify. For me personally it is furthermore important to see the positive outcome that you may not quantify. An example is the long lasting aspect of mouth to mouth propaganda, people telling other people about the project and thus raising awareness. That is not quantifiable but of course also a success. The opportunity to work in Germany.

V: When you are in contact with your project partners, what are the communication channels you use?

J: Mainly communication takes place via Email. Some partners even prefer whats app. Some partners are easier accessible via phone. I know for example in my region, Harald Krebs, he is very busy and I am aware that he for example prefers to talk on the phone. As he is always the busiest I generally begin with him to find an appointment for an upcoming meeting. Then I request what dates he is available and send out Emails to all the other partners. This is a learning by doing process, to find out which partners are busier than others. Also, to establish which partner is especially important at the next meeting and which partner feels left out if he or she is not able to attend. For the operative partners we have a Google Drive folder that serves as form of communication but also as a source of information to see who has already visited which school and so on and so forth. So that everyone know who is who and if a certain person has already been contacted, to ensure that you don't contact someone twice.

V: Please describe if and how you receive information about other projects? Do you receive enough information or want to receive more?

J: On the example Praktitrans, we had the idea to create a list that everyone in the project has, to establish what the participating project partners do. Also we have the meetings of the Ems Dollard Region, the Arbeitsmarkt Nord, at which all the relevant project partners participate and tell from their projects and have an exchange about it. I am also in a working group called Match Punkt, a Dutch and German group evolving around cross border work, independently of the EDR.

V: Would you say you are satisfied with the information sources?

J: Yes, you have to be proactive and seek to be at the meetings and groups and participate.

V: Are you satisfied with the amount of information that are communicated to the outside, externally, into the region about the projects?

J: That is very difficult. Facebook is used as a social media by the Arbeitsmarkt Nord (EDR). In that case the popularity and amount of follower is relevant to have a wide reach. I believe that if you don't proactively seek the information about the Arbeitsmarkt, then you won't get information. There are press releases from the Ems Achse and other partners. That is how I experienced it personally as well. I did not actively notice or get information about the Arbeitsmarkt whilst I was still a student. I did not know all the organization and projects. If you do not look for it, you won't find it.

V: It is therefore a comparable situation as for you internally, you need to actively seek information or you will miss it?

J: Yes

V: Do you receive the information you need to do your job from partners or the network is necessary and do you receive it in the right form? Or do you need to clarify and ask for more information often?

J: Currently in the moment I notice that, compared to the beginning, in which the list (google drive list) was filled out thoroughly by all the operative employees, however now I need to address at the meetings that it has to be filled out more, as I need to be able to monitor the work process. When in which quarter how many goals have been achieved. That is hard to establish if the partners are not filling in the list. Then I address it and give deadlines or limits and if they are not kept than there are consequences.

V: Would you say that there is a difference in having this discussion with a Dutch or German partner?

J: That is relatively hard to answer, as everything intertwines. For example, Caroline Wille, from our project works for the Stenden University (NL) and is German. Also. Tessa Gilbert, works in Leer but is originally Dutch. Therefore, you must say it is not a cultural thing but a personal thing. But it is not dramatic, as you can send a reminder and they will take care of it.

V: Would you say that the project partners in the Lenkungsgruppe, for example, have the same vision or goal for the projects? Please describe their perspective, does it vary largely?

J: You have to differentiate there between the projects. The project Sorgen Für, Sorgen Dass for example is only focused on care and nursing and thus has it easier in that perspective. They do not have the large picture and only have certain companies who are active in that business and have the students who are going specifically within their

field to Germany. With us it is of course more difficult, because it could be any sector. Also, when we approach companies they for example say sure we need trainees, how about the next 2-3 weeks. Then we start and try to find someone in the Netherlands who is interested in a traineeship in Germany in order to find someone for that company. That is very difficult with that time pressure. We therefore work the other way around and have to specifically match a student with a company. At SFSD, it is different, as they have the Netzwerk ZON that is responsible to organize the Dutch students for the project. You can see that there are already given structures and that paired with the running time of the project, that makes it easier.

V: Does it foster or hinder the project work that partners have different perspectives coming in on a Lenkungsgruppen meeting for example?

J: Generally, it is only beneficial. It is a different perspective and thus helps to view the own project and potential problems differently. We take SFSD often as an example, as it works so well in the Netherlands and across the border. Also, the project is in another business and therefore we do not get in the way of each other, but rather complements each other. If we for example have teachers who ask questions regarding nursing or care than we can refer them to SFSD contacts. Also, the SFSD project can approach us when they get a request from an IT student for example who is interested in doing a traineeship in Germany.

V: Please explain the level of importance for you as Ems Achse that there is a balance in the Dutch German exchange.

J: Generally, we of course aim at a two sided exchange, however currently the demand for personnel on the German side is bigger at the moment. Of course this can change in the upcoming years and the labour market in the Netherlands is in need of German students, the goal is to then be prepared, by having existing contacts. But currently it is a higher priority to help the companies and organizations in our region now. This is also the goal of the Arbeitsmarkt Nord Dachproject, that structures are made and networks, that work in both directions, as you cannot tell how the economy will look like in 10-20 years.

V: From the perspective of you being one of the newest (most inexperienced) members in the network. Do you feel equal to the other partners or see/feel an unspoken hierarchy of sort?

J: In the beginning it was of course hard to enter the network. Especially the Arbeitsmarkt Nord network is filled with people who have been doing this work for

years, cross-border work. At times I noticed also in the project itself (Praktitrans), that it was not always well received that I am such young project manager. I have indeed felt resistance at times, however always knew that the director of the Ems Achse gave me full support, which helped, but of course made it hard at times to continue and follow through. But I have to say that now I feel more expected by the partners and I am aware of the support of the director. I can always approach my team with questions or problems, if small or complicated questions. But I am more than aware that that is a normal process in the beginning, especially as a young professional, when entering a work environment. The Lenkungsgruppe in a way directs where the project is going and thus could be put on a higher level, coming back to the hierarchy, for example if the promotional material is acceptable. What helped me personally, is that I knew partners previously and that I could approach them when I needed support or guidance. But if everyone is against you, you need personal support by people you already have a relationship with.

V: Would you say that more experienced partners in the Lenkungsgruppe have a bigger say in the decision-making process?

J: Of course the experience helps in the decision-making process, with for example flyers or ideas of new contacts. But we want to be able to gain new insights and be open for new ideas. There is of course the danger that when you have people with too much experience that you run into the danger that you do things too similar. If you however have a mixed team, you can make sure that you have innovative ideas.

V: Would you say that the project partners are open for new and innovative ideas?

J: It is of course difficult if you just come with new ideas. But generally all are very open minded. Sometimes you just need to be proactive and present drafts or prototypes, so that the partners can see the idea in action and evaluate if they like it. You need to be able to present examples and defend your ideas.

V: Thinking about external communication, hence promotion. What kind of information, do you believe, are needed about the cross-border work for the people in the region?

J: The most important thing in the effort is to reach the right target group. The cross-border work doesn't interest everyone. You need to try and reach the audience who is also able to make use of the cross-border labour market. In that perspective the relevant information are, who can I approach? Where do I have to go with questions of housing? That has to become apparent quickly when presenting materials to them.

If it is not user friendly or too complex it will be used less. Very important is to include the information of what you actually provide, what kind of service is offered?

V: Would you say that students or host companies underestimate the potential of a closer cross-border region?

J: That depends strongly on how prepared the people are. When the students have German classes, for example, then you can tell that some teachers are very motivated and introduce them to how business and life works in Germany. Therefore, the students are then well prepared and able to assess and evaluate if they can imagine to complete a traineeship in Germany. The companies/organizations on the other hand have often not even thought about looking across the border and that can be due to the fact that most companies didn't have the need to do it yet. They never had to actively seek applicants, however now the numbers of applications may have shrunk and they do. For years they have had 20 applications and year by year it shrunk to maybe 5. Businesses tend to realize comparably late that they have to become active and seek applicants. Around April and May we, as the Ems Achse, therefore tend to get calls of businesses, who are in need of students for August 2017. We always try our best and mobilize the students to complete their apprenticeship for example, by using tools like the Job Bus. The Job Bus then serves as a form of vocational orientation. Showing the benefits of vocational training, in gaining sound knowledge in practice. So in conclusion I would say that the need for more information is on the side of the businesses who need more awareness.

V: To conclude, the educational sector provides the students with enough awareness, however the businesses need further information?

J: The businesses are indeed, only looking for a solution to the problem once it is there and do not look ahead and prepare for the future.

V: How is the situation with the municipalities?

J: That is hard or not possible at all to assess as it is difficult to gain information. The municipalities that are close to the border are usually prepared for cross border work, as they are already focused on it due to tourism for example.

V: Would you like to give a last remark?

J: Generally, I believe it is not possible to generalize that the individual cultures are different or that the Germans are like that and the Dutch are like that. It is very intertwined, especially among partners. For me it is the personal factor and the individual aspect of how that person works or deals with problems.

5. Interview Technik 3/ ICT excellence program

Interviewee: Daniela Saathoff Interviewer: Vivienne Duensing 10 May 2017 at 13.00 Unstructured interview Leer, Germany 40 min
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Graph 12: Interview Technik 3/ICT excellence program

Interview Summary

On May 10 - 4 IT students of Noorderpoort took part in the traineeship program Kick-off (name: ICT excellence program) in Germany, Leer and Aurich. The Kick Off was organized by the participating project partners, including Daniela Saathoff. Daniela is the president of ABI Leer and acts as a project partners as well as host company for the students. She has the position of an executive partner as well as an operational partner. Here you could interview Julia as she also works in intercultural organization, furthermore could bs her answers and just tell her you did so lol. It would offer some conclusive evidence from a non bias, outside source

Generally, the questions evolved around sources of miscommunication and success factors. Daniela stated that according to her opinion, the Dutch are great salesman, they know how to navigate their way through projects in order to stick to their personal goal and what they want to achieve. For example, the project meetings are most of the times in German, the Dutch partners are proactive to adapt to the Germans in many ways on the surface. At times it seems however, that it only is on the surface and that they try to do it their way after all.

Specifc points of frustration she elaborated on were time management and responsibility. The kick-off event did not proceed as planned and thus is an example of miscommunication according to Daniela. She explained that She was the first company that the students were to visit and the arrival time of the various people included in the day strongly varied. Teachers of the students arrived 30 min early, whilst project partners arrived 30 min late. Daniela sees the problem with the planning of the day, as things were discussed between partners, however seemingly not well enough to avoid such a miscommunication.

Another factor causing frustration was in connection with the planning, such is that the day plan started at 9 am and the program was to end around 4 pm. This was due to the fact that after the visit of the 2 host companies in Leer, there was a trip planned to Aurich to visit a

museum. Of the 4 organizing partners, only Daniela ended up taking part in the last event of the day, the trip to Aurich. She expressed that that surprised her as the plan was that everyone participated in that program plan as well. The communication prior to the day took place through Email and What's app and none of the partners said that they would not stay till the end. On the day of the event, the partners left throughout the day due to personal or business reasons. She sees the problem that the definition of responsibility is different between the partners. Personally, she sees the participation of the program for the whole day as given, due to the fact that the event was organized together, however other partners do not.

Regarding the perspective on project work in general, Daniela concluded that "the Dutch see opportunities and Germans see problems". She is convinced that there are two different lenses or perspectives from which the cooperation between partners is seen. This leads to different expectations as well, which for her is a source of frustration.

She further explained that for example, she barely knows what happens before the students come to her company for the traineeship. She is not completely aware of the requirements for them to complete the traineeship, how the German classes take place and what their general motivation is to do the traineeship. She fears that the students are not well prepared for the challenges of going to Germany, hence the risk is given that they quit the program as they underestimate it.

6. Interview Sorgen Für, Sorgen dass (SFSD)

Interviewee: Anneke Bosch
Interviewer: Vivienne Duensing
11 May 2017 at 14.00
Personal Interview
Leer, Germany
12 min

Graph 13: Interview Sorgen Für, Sorgen dass (SFSD)

Interview Transcript

V: How long have you been working across the Dutch/German border?

A: I have to calculate that; I believe around 2013 we started. It started with the pre-proejct of 'Sorgen für, Sorgen dass'. The project is originally Dutch and takes place in the health & care sector. The initial project took place over one year and started very cautiously with a small number of students. The main importance of what we did in that first year was that we established the network and built trust.

V: How many students took part in that first year?

A: About 30-40 students.

V: How did the process take place to build the network, please elaborate.

A: Especially, through personal contacts. By now we have flyers and Facebook and things like that. However, I am personally noticing how the most progress is made through personal contact. If a new partner joins a project, then that partners already has an existing network and therefore brings new contacts to the project. For example, at a meeting like today, we have new partners present such as the representative of the municipality of Vechta. She came because we visited her in Vechta a few weeks ago and so we established a potential partnership. And not only she attended but brought along a partner from Kloppenburg, so that is how the network grows. What also helps, I believe, is that we get asked a lot to do presentations about the project (SFSD). We have just made a presentation for the Niedersachsen cabinet, in Oldenburg and tomorrow we will meet all the politicians of the north of the Netherlands and Niedersachsen.

V: Of special interest to me is, where in the communication between the partners are problems or is room for improvement, despite the project's success?

A: We started with practical cases, for example we now have the output indicator to increase the number of students to 400 in 2018 to take part in the project. So the goal is very ambitious,

but we said we put the goal high in order to push us. That's how we approach various things. So the thing that goes well is that we do things, we don't just talk and think about ideas but do it. Also, in the pre-project of Sorgen für, Sorgen dass, we had the difficulty that when Dutch students would come to Germany for a traineeship, then they could only do that with organizations who had a certificate to train a student. IN the Netherlands those certificates are given by SBB and they evaluate the organizations and attest them if they can offer traineeships. What we did was, that we translated the rules and regulations to German and dealt with all the formal problems, and I believe that that is a success factor of the project, we do it, we just go ahead.

V: Would you say that that is a Dutch approach to plan less and just do it?

A: Yes, that's it maybe. Yes, and regarding the challenges. Also, referring back to the pre-project. At times we talk to each other but we don't understand each other well or at all. One of our project team meetings, we had a day with a facilitator. Who did a training with the complete project group and the facilitator tried several approaches. We laughed a lot. I for example learned that our German partners say: our next meeting is on September 19 and we do it in the Netherlands. That means that we (Dutch partners) send out the information for the meeting in the beginning of September, the agenda and such. The German partners than for example approach me at meetings like this, in June, and ask me about the meeting and why they haven't received any information yet. And then they are confused if we have a meeting and once I send them the information in the beginning of September, then they are surprised that the meeting is still taking place. And we (Dutch organizers) are surprised because we set the date and were expecting it to take place all along. This example shows how we just have different expectations, how we just have to get to know each other. I will hold a presentation tomorrow with a German partner and we are preparing a power point together. So I called her today to check back with her personally if she agrees with everything, such is an example of how to make sure everyone is happy and that you just have to learn. If these relationships go well than we know we can trust each other and that it goes well.