



UNIVERCITY
ACTION LAB

The Netherlands

Good Practice Case Study

Utrecht Co-Challenge

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PROJECT PARTNERS



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GENERAL INFORMATION

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|---|--|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Title of the case | Utrecht Co-challenge | | | |
| Sales pitch | Co-create solutions to life's professional challenges | | | |
| Organisations | • Graduate School of Life Sciences and Career Services of Utrecht University, UMC Utrecht (UMCU), The City of Utrecht | | | |
| Country | Netherlands | | | |
| Authors | • Hacer Tercanli | | | |
| Nature of interaction | Student societal co-challenge programme, in collaboration with educational, corporate experts and municipality | | | |
| Level of mechanism | <input type="checkbox"/> Government policy (e.g. law, funding framework) <input type="checkbox"/> Organisational strategy (e.g. university/business/agency) <input type="checkbox"/> Structural element (e.g. centre, lab, office) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Operational level (e.g. activity or programme) | | | |
| Length of programme | <table border="1"><tr><td>Short – 2 weeks</td><td>Formality</td><td>Formal</td></tr></table> | Short – 2 weeks | Formality | Formal |
| Short – 2 weeks | Formality | Formal | | |
| Curricula-bound, co or extra-curricular? | <table border="1"><tr><td>Co-Curricula</td><td>Level of initiative</td><td>Inter-institutional</td></tr></table> | Co-Curricula | Level of initiative | Inter-institutional |
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Summary

The Utrecht Co-challenge is an elective course for the students of University of Utrecht (Bachelor year 3, master and PhD), HU University of Applied Sciences (Hogeschool Utrecht), and recent graduates.



CASE STUDY PROFILE

BACKGROUND

The programme director, Michele Gerbrands, designed the concept and created the Utrecht EDU-Challenge course programme in 2014, during her position as the Manager of the Innovation in Technology Enhanced Learning unit at Medical Center Utrecht (MCU).

Recognising the lack of student involvement in the concept and product development in Technology Enhanced Learning, she decided to launch the first national challenge that is open to all students of Universities of Applied Sciences across the Netherlands. The participants of this first round of the challenge programme developed their own technology enhanced learning products and materials, while supported by professionals and mentors, and a networking event to pitch and receive feedback.

The current concept of the Co-challenge has developed from this pilot initiative, with the programme now serving local universities and urban stakeholders of the city of Utrecht, into collaboratively tackling societal challenges.

CONTEXT

The Co-challenge programme operates in an institutional and local context where interdisciplinary collaboration between students from various fields, governmental bodies, professional education and the corporate world is recognised as an important ingredient of sustainable development. The students are encouraged by not only their coaches and tutors, but also by involved stakeholders to be creative, versatile, and well prepared to participate in the fast-paced world of work through collaborative forms of generating knowledge.

This well-networked context also allows joint exploration of innovative teaching and learning models among the educators in Utrecht, which feeds back into the quality improvement of the course. The programme director, Michele Gerbrands, collaborates with a group of educational professionals in Utrecht for 'cross level' learning, who have formed the group 'Utrecht Smart Education', involving eight vocational institutions, Universities of Applied Sciences, and the University of Utrecht. The purpose is to increase knowledge and practice in challenge-based learning, and creating an authentic learning environment for students.

OBJECTIVES AND MOTIVATIONS

The goal of the course programme is to personally and professionally prepare the student for the world of work, with its emphasis on developing relevant skills, including pitching, networking, intercultural communication, creativity, giving and receiving feedback, and business modelling.

The objective of the programme is to provide a platform for the students to:

- Work in an interdisciplinary team
- Solve a real-world problem in co-creation with professionals from the educational and corporate world
- Extend their professional network and brand themselves
- Immerse in reflecting and extending skills and talents with a coach and own team

To achieve the interdisciplinary approach to team building and knowledge generation, the programme officially located in the University Medical Center Utrecht (UMCU) is expanding its reach to the students of Utrecht University and HU University of Applied Sciences. This is also an important feature of the programme that is attractive to the students, to be able to work with peers from diverse backgrounds.

STAKEHOLDERS

The stakeholders of the Co-challenge course programme include professionals from the educational, governmental and corporate world in the city of Utrecht, as well as students as 'co-creators' and beneficiaries.

PROCESS

INPUT

University Medical Center Utrecht (UMCU) is the financial and strategic facilitator/coordinator of the initiative, through the department of Biomedical Sciences run by Professor Dr. Harold van Rijen. The Co-challenge programme is made up of 7 staff members as the organising team, supported with a number of experts for each challenge, as well as inspirational speakers and workshop providers. The career Center Utrecht provides the Co-challenge team one lecturer to facilitate team building. The director of the programme takes up her role as part of her full time employment at UMCU, and the team members are sharing roles in the event management, communications, and research on the student skills development. There are student entrepreneurs involved in the programme as coaches affiliated with ENACTUS.

The budget for the speakers from the corporate world (6 in average per course) are spared from the budget of the MCU. On the other hand, the professionals from the Municipality and from the university volunteer to share their knowledge and experience with the programme participants.

ACTIVITIES

On average, 20-25 students attend the Co-challenge course every year, working in groups of five during the challenge. The program runs through two weeks, with the activities for each week as summarised below:

The first week starts with a plenary workshop where participating students get acquainted with their peers and form teams. This is followed by inspirational sessions (30 minutes) and workshops where topics are discussed more in-depth, e.g. on Design Thinking and interviewing, as well as reflections on values and mindfulness.

With their team, students analyse the identified problem and prepare an interview with the client. During the analysis process, students are supported by a team of mentors, e.g. in the case of the problem of mental pressure, a student-psychologist shares his knowledge on the topic, a researcher shows the latest insights from an academic perspective and an entrepreneur tells more on how to stay mentally healthy.

Mid-week, the teams pitch their concept at a networking event and receive feedback. The first week is wrapped up with student teams peer-reviewing each other.

In the second week, the teams attend workshops on intercultural communication, business modelling and work further to complete their concept. The teams then present the final concept to the client and a jury, and submit a written report. During this week the students create a team pitch for the client or an individual elevator pitch that they have to record on video. The activity is guided by a coach who guides the teams through the process of preparing and delivering their pitch. The jury includes CEOs from companies, policy makers from the municipality, students who have started their own business, professors, and the clients of the projects who receive the products and the reports at the event.

The students are also expected to submit a personal reflection report, upon directions and input they receive in a 'mindfulness' session.

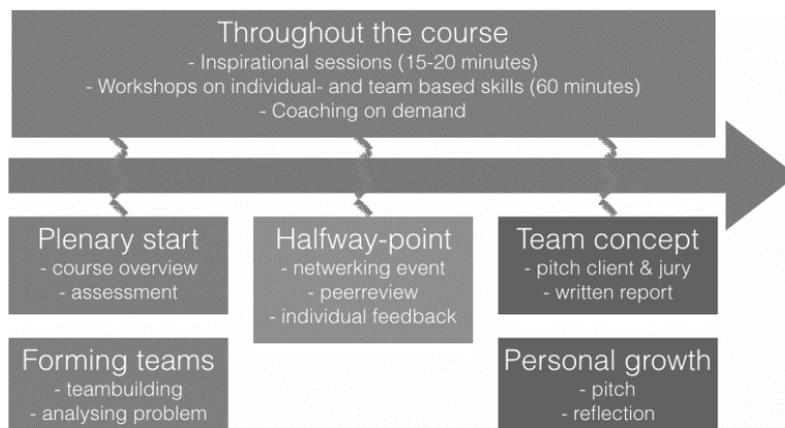


Diagram 1: Co-challenge course structure Source: The programme website

In order to help participating students to identify their teams, and discover individual soft skills techniques and tools that are needed to deliver a strong concept, the programme provides short

inspirational sessions and workshops. There are also a number of on-demand coaches if student teams need help.

- The challenge theme of 2019 is to identify interventions to prevent the impact of mental pressures experienced by the students that study in the city of Utrecht. The goal is to understand and relieve some of these pressures before they lead to mental and physical problems. The previous years' themes included tackling loneliness and increasing cycling and reducing driving in the city.



OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

OUTPUTS

With each run of the course, around 20 students successfully complete the course. These students are divided in 4 to 5 teams and all write an advisory report for the client in which they explain their solution and how it will solve the problem. The client can choose one or multiple projects to develop further and/or implement.

IMPACTS

The Municipality of Utrecht has a number of challenges to tackle in the city, and through their participation, they benefit from the new ideas and approaches that the students propose. The experience has an impact on students' perception of challenges and how to tackle those, development entrepreneurial competencies, and better understanding of where to look for resources for solutions. Those who develop ideas for a service or product-oriented startup are directed to the entrepreneurship centre Utrechtinc and Studentinc. with further support provided to the students there. The students are encouraged and trained to become 'entrepreneurial' rather than merely becoming entrepreneurs.

The informal feedback from the participants show that there are students who are willing to take up an entrepreneurial path after their discovery of their skills during the Co-challenge programme.

SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENT & SYSTEM

SUPPORTING MECHANISMS

The stakeholder ecosystem in the city of Utrecht, and their joint vision towards tackling societal challenges through co-operative action is one of the most crucial supporting elements in the success of the programme. The policy content, both in the city and in the higher education

institutions involved, as well as the availability of funding for the coordination and implementation of the course programme are other support mechanisms.

There is an established cycle of monitoring and evaluation of the process and the outputs of the programme via surveys and face-to-face participant meetings. The management team ensures to respond to the immediate and short and long-term needs of the students. In addition, one of the staff members of the programme monitors the students' skills development regularly as part of her PhD research.

BARRIERS AND DRIVERS

The complex working structure of the Municipality and their lack of staff assigned to coordinate the partnership with the Co-Challenge programme remains a barrier for the further development of the relationships between the two stakeholders. Despite their involvement, the inavailability of mechanisms within the Municipality does not allow ideas generated by the students to be taken up by the officials as potential solutions to be materialised for local challenges.

Another barrier for the course programme's better reach and impact is its short duration of 10 days, which does not facilitate students' further investigations via research or further development of their concepts in terms of pilots and/or prototypes. That is one of the aims of the programme management to facilitate this process.



LESSONS LEARNED

CHALLENGES

The challenge is the timeframe of the programme that is delivered over two-weeks, and during the regular semester period, which makes it difficult to attract larger groups of students due to their commitments. The communication with the other universities is also proving to be challenging, since the individual departments work in silos, and thus interrupt the information flow for the promotion of the programme in the university.

To overcome this, the contact is established with the Career Center of the Utrecht University, as a single point of communication for promotion and dissemination. Other channels include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and representatives of student associations to reach the stakeholders and students for participation, and the dissemination of results. Regarding the timeframe, the management have been working to develop a blended form of the programme to create more flexibility in time and place.

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

One of the major key success factors is the motivation and self-interest of the organisation team in developing the programme further, and increasing its capacity while keeping a high standard of quality. Another factor is the diversity of the local stakeholders who are willing to invest their time and knowledge into supervising students, and thus helping to build the culture of collaborative innovation.

The Co-challenge programme is well institutionalised, since there has been motivation and strong financial support present by the UMCU leadership. The support includes flexibility given to the Co-challenge course management in the launch and operations, as well as recognition acquired from the staff and students from the participant universities, and regional stakeholders. To increase local impact, the management is in the planning phase to reach out to larger corporate business organisations for their participation in the programme, as either clients, or speakers and coaches.



FURTHER INFORMATION

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

TRANSFERABILITY

The model can be transferrable to other institutional or regional contexts, with education systems built on student-centred learning, and where learner participation for co-creation is encouraged. The culture of the co-creation and democratic decision-making should also be present in the local ecosystem, therefore the involvement and commitment of the diverse groups of stakeholders into the programme can be ensured.

PUBLICATIONS

Examples of Talent Programmes:

<https://techniekpact.nl/cdi/files/5527b14fa4c753e14aab34fbfa6dd9ec5d7176bf.pdf>

Utrecht's Co-create program – Empowering Students to Tackle Social Challenges:

https://wexhe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/e-WEXHE-Journal_Issue_3_2018.pdf

LINKS

<https://www.co-challenge.com/>

www.umcutrecht.nl

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