EVENT STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

UNIFY - STUDY IN HOLLAND

Made by Kaloian Arnaudov

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I.   Preface

The YP portfolio represents all the work I have done for UNIFY on the topic "Event Strategy Framework". The foundation of this project is the creation of an interactive, informative and fun environment for them to engage in when taking part in educational fairs both online and offline. The world of events is ever-changing as technologies are also moving forward quickly, thus it is important to evaluate the long-term effects on any event strategy.

The idea of this project was initiated with the client a long time ago in a discussion regarding the way of organizing events. It was concluded that there is a need of a more innovative way to engage and inform the students who are interested in studying in the Netherlands. The pandemic of Covid-19 made it more difficult as the students could only join online fairs instead of the usual face-to-face ones. My interest in the event industry challenged me to take part in the project and try to help the company with my expertise and skills.

I would also like to thank the YP group and tutors for their valuable input during the whole process. Their advice, questions, expertise and feedback contributed to my project. I would also like to express my gratitude towards the team of UNIFY for enabling me to access all information about their business and for the many valuable discussions which helped when developing my project. Lastly, I would like to thank all students that expressed their wishes and needs in the survey. The hospitality experience is all about the customers and this project wouldn't have been possible without their input.

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14/06/2021

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II.   Executive Summary

Hospitality is one of the most important aspects when looking at the foundation of every organization. In present times, due to lockdowns and quarantine established from the pandemic of Covid-19, hospitality has become a challenge. Social distancing, empty offices and travel restrictions have created a struggle for any business to operate properly.

This project aims to propose and evaluate possible solutions for UNIFY, related to transforming their event strategy in both an online and when possible, offline environment. The paper also aims to research, analyze and take into consideration the opinions of the students who are in contact with UNIFY at the moment.

The structure of the project aims to first analyze the current state of the business and provide suitable and relevant solutions to the question of the client. Key concepts have been studied and incorporated into research to provide valid and reliable results and conclusions.

The final product which is delivered consists of different parts that could help the company in the future. A draft calendar, recommendations, innovative solutions and surveys are created for the new event strategy. Also, the product contains measurements for the success of the framework and a financial analysis for future events.

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Declaration of own work

I hereby declare that:

- I am fully informed about the Professional Product PF criteria;
- all the work I have conducted to fulfill these criteria is entirely my own;
- I have not been assisted by any other person, except the coaching offered within HBS guidelines.

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The following chapter presents the substantiation of the professional product with the relevant figures, graphs and desk research.

1. Introduction

The following table presents an overview of where information can be found for each of the assessment criteria.

Table 1. Information about assessment criteria

Assessment criterion	Relevant information within professional product	Relevant information within substantiation
The professional answers the client's question with an appropriate and substantiated professional product.	Please view: SWOT analysis Survey results Best practice Recommendations	Please view: 2.Management question 3.Solution strategies 4.4 Use of results
The professional identifies the most important (internal and external) trends and developments and clarifies their influence on the issue.	Please view: Event industry trends Relevant trends and developments SWOT analysis	Please view: 2.2Relevant trends and developments 4.2.1 Analysis current situation SWOT analysis
The professional collects knowledge in a responsible way to support a decision and valuates this knowledge.	Please view: Survey results Calendar Best practice	Please view: 4.Use of knowledge
The professional justifies how the wishes of the stakeholders have been taken into account in the final product.		Please view: 4.3.2 Expectations and experience of the target group 5.Stakeholders
The professional substantiates the extent to which the made choices are socially responsible (e.g. with regard to ethical, intercultural and sustainability aspects).	Please view: Event industry trends Relevant trends and developments	Please view: 5.Stakeholders
The professional demonstrates the financial feasibility of the professional product.		Please view: 6.Finance

2. Management question of the client

UNIFY – Study in Holland is currently experiencing changes in their internal and external environment due to the pandemic of COVID-19 and the increased demand. The old ways of organizing events and activities have also changed due to social distancing and regulations hoping to lower the spread of the virus. Students applying for Dutch universities have reported that their customer journey has changed with regards to the communication with the consultancy and the universities. The lack of face-to-face contact during the events and fairs has created a gap within the company. UNIFY – Study in Holland would like to adjust their event strategy to be more successful and transform potential leads to clients. The mission of the company is to provide high-quality services and inform the public efficiently in ways of even more personal contact. Internally, UNIFY would like to improve their online systems and ways of organizing events and activities. The management question which was formed is the following: **How can UNIFY – Study in Holland implement a new event strategy to continue reaching potential Bulgarian students in an online and offline setting?**

To design a product which corresponds with the current changes in an external context, trends and developments will be researched. The past year has shifted the way businesses handle their events and activities. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it impossible to have a face-to-face contact and has shifted everything to an online environment. Many businesses have been forced to rethink their strategies and have had a huge impact both negative and positive. Madray states that many companies have been successful due to interactive and innovative online strategies (Madray, 2020). Interaction with the clients should remain a key aspect of UNIFY's strategy, thus new ways of organizing events and activities should take place. New trends are outlined for 2021 such as Hybrid events and outdoor events. The use of technology is also a key factor in changing the strategies of many businesses (Keegan, 2020).

2.1 Target Group

The customers of UNIFY are aged between 16 and 19 as discussed with the client Mrs. Gencheva (Gencheva, 2021 personal communication). Thus, the target group in the professional product is Generation-Z (Gen-Z). According to Anna Dolot (2018) the Gen-Z are a group of people born between 1997 and 2010 and are the first generation that grew with full access to the internet. Moreover, they are known as IGeneration, a generation of tech and digital nomads. Gen-Z are raised with the internet, meaning that they spent a reasonable amount of time online. Furthermore, they use it for educational purposes. A survey of 1300 people in middle and high school made by Barnes and Noble College (2018) found out that 89% of the respondents rate higher education as valuable. Moreover, Gen-Z aim to have a good balance between work and life. They are looking for flexibility and trust within their jobs or study environment. Finally, personal connection is important for the generation. They need conversation and personal experience with others as that would certainly improve their career advancement in the future (Chillakuri, 2020).

2.2 Relevant Trends and Developments

To answer the management question, it is important to analyze the environment. A DESTEP analysis will be made to determine the relevant trends and developments.

- **Demographic factors**

A fast-growing demographic trend is studying abroad and in the case of the company, in the Netherlands. This trend is growing more and more worldwide as Gen-Z seek new experiences, advanced communication, and personal and academic development abroad. Looking at the Netherlands, the country welcomed around 82 000 students in 2016/2017 which makes up 11,4% of the overall student population. The students choose English-taught programs and look for an internationally friendly environment (Eurogates, 2017). Looking at Bulgarian students, 15% of them choose to study abroad after finishing their secondary education. Dutch universities see a steady increase in the last years and currently there are more than 3100 Bulgarian students in the Netherlands, which ranks Bulgarians sixth in the chart. Moreover, the tuition fee is very attractive (2043 euros), and the Ministry of Education in the Netherlands decided to cut it by half for first year students (Novinite, 2019).

- **Economic factors**

From an economic point of view, the Netherlands is considered a budget-friendly country for students. Finance is an important aspect for students and their parents. The tuition fee is quite attractive compared to other countries in the EU. The cost of living in the Netherlands varies between 700€ and 1000€. Around a third of the cost mostly goes for housing which varies between 300€ to 500€. Another third is spent on food and the rest goes for leisure, travel and other expenses. Finding housing can be challenging and additional costs such as amenities should be considered (Educations, 2021). Another economic aspect is the fact that the Dutch government offers loans for rent, studies, insurance and more (Belastingdienst, 2021).

- **Social factors**

A trend that is representative in the social environment is the trend of social media. As mentioned before, the target group Generation-Z are very active on social media. Gen-Z matter for any business as they account for 40% of all customers. However, they have an attention span of 8 seconds, thus the strategy used should keep that in consideration. Research shows that 45% of all teens spend time online and on social media, but also a survey shows that they still rely on emails. Campaign monitor (2020) describe that providing a personal touch can increase sales and engagement with the customers. Furthermore, collaboration with Gen-Z is key to create a cult between them and the company. UNIFY – Study in Holland are active on social media and aim to provide the best customer service to their clients. The trends in social media can be looked at to reach more people in the future.

- **Political factors**

On a political level, the development of COVID-19 has changed the world. Due to the pandemic, every country around the world has forced new rules and regulations. The event industry has been forced to change to comply to these restrictions. Research shows that 90% of the business of companies was cancelled for the period March-July 2020 (Madray, 2020). UNIFY- Study in Holland has also gone through change as all their face-to-face meeting and events were cancelled. The COVID-19 situation has caused a change in the way that the company contacts their clients as all meetings and fairs are done online. However, with the vaccination process undergoing, regulations are slowly starting to drop which can have a positive effect on the company and an innovative strategy could take place in both an online and offline environment.

- **Ecological factors**

The most important ecological factor around the world is sustainability. The event industry is also trying to be more sustainable by using different tools and processes. One way of doing so is using mobile apps and digital tools to reduce paper usage. Another example is using biodegradable cups and plates during the event (UCF, 2020). COVID-19 has changed the way we live, however there are positive developments in sustainability. Moving online has decreased our ecological footprint mainly because aspects such as travel, catering and noise pollution have drastically dropped. With regulations slowly being dropped there are new ways of organizing events. Outdoor events are gaining popularity and increase sustainability, because of the decrease of energy usage. Lastly, with technology evolving quickly there will be new and more sustainable ways of making events.

3. **Solution Strategies**

The following chapter will present the relevance of the created professional product and the fit within the outlined trends and developments above. Also, this chapter will present the pros and cons of the professional product.

3.1 **Relevance of the professional product**

The research of the target group shows that Gen-Z are very active online and are what we call technical nomads. The respondents from the survey give out a preference for the platforms that they like to use, thus creating an overview for UNIFY. The students joining the events seek quality information from the company and its stakeholders- the Dutch universities. Many of the customers of UNIFY have

already done research and seek extra information regarding different topics such as housing, job opportunities, insurance etc.

The professional product is also low-cost, considering that all the activities and events are organized online due to the pandemic of COVID-19. On the other hand, organizing an offline event would cost a lot more. In the case of offline events, a budget will be created to organize the activity.

Lastly, the professional product aims to help the company be more innovative. The client Mrs.Gencheva states that they are busy in the office and do not have enough time to change the way they organize their events and have reached out for a new strategy (Gencheva, 2021 personal communication). The product aims to provide tools for better engagement with the clients and to continue the internal trend of providing the highest possible quality of information. A calendar will be created to outline more activities during the year which aims to reach more people and provide more time slots for providing the necessary information.

3.2   Fit within the described trends and developments
The creation of the new event strategy is based on the relevant trends and developments described below. The next rows provide a link between the professional product and the trends and developments.

Demographic trend

As described earlier the demographic trend of Bulgarians studying abroad is key. The professional product is created to provide more information and promote the studies in the Netherlands and is in line with the trend. Furthermore, Gen-Z seek new experiences so the professional product should provide a guide for creating new activities to attract more attention form the target group.

Economic trend

The professional product is not directly linked to this trend, but it will be outlined in the guidebook. The Netherlands is a budget-friendly country which makes it quite attractive for the Bulgarian students. More financial topics should be included in UNIFY's strategy to ease the pressure that many students and their parents have.

Social trend

The professional product fits with the social trend. As mentioned above, Gen-Z are extremely active online so making the activities and events online fits their needs. The new event strategy should aim to be more attractive for the clients.

Political trend

Due to the restrictions that come along with the COVID-19 pandemic, UNIFY has moved all their activities and events online for the time being. Face-to-face fairs are currently banned due to the pandemic. Creating the new event strategy aims to provide new and innovative ideas to reach out to the clients in an online environment.

Ecological trend

Sustainability is well and truly a trend that needs to be considered for any business. Moreover, events are online which decreases the footprint, food waste etc. that is left after offline fairs. Furthermore, the new event strategy is more financially feasible for the company.

3.3   Pros and cons of the professional product

The strategy of the professional product is to provide an even better experience for UNIFY's customers by engaging them more and providing valuable information. The strategy will be implemented both in an online and offline environment, if possible, with regards to the COVID-19 pandemic. The online activities and events will take place in different online platforms and the information provided will aim to engage the clients and relieve stress of topics such as finance, housing, what to study, etc. In the

beginning it was considered to provide that sort of information in the already existing events of the company, however it is key that separate sessions are created to provide the most valuable and important elements (Gencheva, 2021 personal communication). Another positive aspect of the product is organizing events that aim to provide information regarding specific spheres and not just universities in general. For example, the product aims to provide a calendar with the different study programmes with a booked week where that specific sphere will be promoted. Creating such a strategy, however, could also be a con for the company as many competitors could see it as an opportunity to expand their own business. UNIFY creates the best value for its customers and thus this product is created specifically for the company. Another con could be that the new strategy will be cost-wise insufficient.

4.   Use of knowledge

The following section describes the knowledge gathered while developing the professional product.

4.1   Required knowledge

To support the development of the product four research questions were outlined in previously in the plan of approach.

The questions and the order are as follows:

1.   *What are UNIFY currently doing when organizing events and activities for their clients?*
2.   *What are the expectations and experience of the target group?*
3.   *What new content can be created to reach students each month?*
4.   *What are ways of measuring performance of the event strategy?*

4.2   Knowledge collection

Table 2. Research Table

Research question	Research Primary/ Secondary	Research Method	Analysis/Tools/ Models	Presenting the results	Relevance to the professional product
What are UNIFY currently doing when organizing events and activities for their clients?	Secondary Research	Study of company's event strategy Literature review	Statistical analysis SWOT analysis	Description of tables Description of collected input	Necessary to understand how the company organizes its events to create a product that fits the mission, vision, and strategy.
What are the expectations and experience of the target group?	Primary quantitative & qualitative research Secondary Research	Literature review Survey Observation of the target group	Qualtrics Online communities Personas	Description of survey Description of target group	Essential for understanding whether the target group is on board and what aspects need to be addressed in the product.

What new content can be created in order to reach students each month?	Primary & Secondary Research	Study of existing content Survey Discussion with employees	Content Analysis Calendar of events	Description of calendar and content	Important to understand the needs of the customers and creating new and realistic content.
What are ways of measuring performance of the event strategy?	Secondary Research	Literature review Study of best practices Interview	KPIs	Description of practices, interview and content	Key for setting the base for further measurement of progress and performance of the event strategy.

4.2.1 Analysis current situation

In preparation for creating a suitable professional product for the client, it is essential to study, analyze and formulate conclusions regarding the current situation of UNIFY. The following chapter will present how knowledge will be collected to design an event strategy framework which meets the needs of the client.

1. What are UNIFY currently doing when organizing events and activities for their clients?

First and foremost, information will be gathered from the client to outline the key characteristics of the business – mission, vision, and strategies. The established characteristics will be followed by a SWOT analysis. The SWOT analysis will be applied determining the strengths and weaknesses of the internal factors of the company.

Furthermore, to answer the research question at this stage of the product, analytical data will be collected regarding the events and activities that are currently tailored by UNIFY. This data will be used to outline conclusions regarding the current event strategy. In addition, surveys will be created through Qualtrics and Google Forms to establish the most popular platforms.

Lastly, it is important to figure out from where the clients find out about UNIFY and their events. The client Mrs. Gencheva wants to know how to reach more clients, thus the survey will also aim to outline a conclusion about the topic (Gencheva, 2021 personal communication).

4.2.2 Research of the experience and expectation of the target group

To answer the research question of the following stage of the professional product two research methods have been chosen: quantitative data collection method- survey, and a qualitative data collection method- literature review and observation.

2. What are the expectations and experience of the target group?

To develop a sufficient event strategy framework for UNIFY it is important to research and study the expectations of the target group and their experiences with the services of the company. A literature review of the concept of Service Quality is conducted to set suitable measurements for the formulation of the online survey. Furthermore, the trend of Online Communities is considered to figure out the needs of the target group. Last, personas will be created to outline the different variants of the target group.

Service Quality (SQ) is a multidimensional concept that has been studied by multiple researchers and its levels are defined in academic articles (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985). For this purpose, the SQ will be defined in 5 levels: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (see Appendix 4: Operationalization of Service Quality). By evaluating the expectations and perceptions of the customers of the above mentioned 5 levels, the researcher can gain a complete overview of the demands and expectations of the target group based on service quality. The study will focus on 4 of the 5 levels as the event strategy in times of COVID-19 is an intangible asset of UNIFY, thus the tangibility level will be excluded.

Online surveys have also been conducted to answer the research question. The population of the research is represented by the database of UNIFY. The population has been broken down in order to conduct the research. A representative sample of the population is used to determine the external validity of the results (Verhoeven, 2016). To assure the external validity of the results of the survey, specific groups have been outlined together with the client. The population selected are students who have experienced the pandemic of COVID-19, but also two groups that are outlined by UNIFY- 12th grade students who are going to study in the Netherlands and 10th-11th grade students who still have their options open. The surveys will be conducted in Qualtrics and Google Forms. Furthermore, personas will be created to match the population that was outlined for the online survey. The two beforementioned groups will have two separate personas as their characteristics vary. It is important to include a persona for the parent figure who is a key stakeholder for UNIFY. The parent persona is created together with the client (see Appendix 2: Personas).

Lastly, research is conducted for the trend of Online Communities. Online communities are individuals who share and receive information online. Their demographics are quite different. The span of topics varies between professional and personal ones and the users interact on shared interests. The affordable online platforms have made it easier to communicate and sharing external and internal knowledge has never been this easy. The knowledge share is big as these communities learn from each other, meet experts and access valuable information online (University of Maryland, 2020). In such a community, the individuals with greater social capital contribute with more knowledge, in this case UNIFY has the largest social capital and they can benefit from the trend of online communities. Being active in such a community can boost any business to provide quality information and engage with their clients. Thus, creating social impact (University of Maryland, 2020).

4.2.3 Determine the content and message

To plan the events and activities for delivering the appropriate content it is required to gain an understanding what the clients are experiencing and demanding, it this case – the students.

3. What new content can be created to reach students each month?

In order to decide what new content has to reach the clients in the future, online surveys will be conducted to gain an understanding of the wishes and experiences of the students. It is important to understand the feelings and feedback of the current students that take part in the fairs and activities of UNIFY and then apply it in the future. The two surveys are created with the client Mrs. Gencheva and aim to get better insights for several topics- creation of new fairs (online and offline), quality of content, choice of platforms and overall organization. Moreover, an expert interview is conducted to study a best practice.

The event industry has taken a huge blow due to the pandemic of COVID-19 and the need for change and adaptation to the new normal is in the spotlight. In order to decide what new content needs to reach the clients it is also important to look at the trends in the event industry. There are five major trends that have been outlined by researchers and companies- hybrid events, outdoor events, rise of technology, personalization and low-cost structure (Keegan, 2020). According to the Singapore Management University (SMU) adaptation through digitalization will be key for the future of the industry. There are many advantages of organizing events online starting from lower costs as accommodation and transportation become invaluable. Further, data gathering becomes much easier as using digital platforms makes measuring the event more accurate. If an event participation is difficult geographically

or due to sickness, going digital makes it possible to gather a wider audience even when the possibilities come short (SMU, 2020). The professional product will aim to provide a framework for the different possibilities of organizing events and providing new content in an online or hybrid way taking into account the developments of COVID-19.

Lastly, a draft yearly calendar will be created. It is first essential to study the results of the online surveys in order to tailor events that meet the needs and expectations of the clients. The content calendar will provide an overview of new events and activities that can take place during the year. UNIFY organizes two key events during the year- Holland Days in the autumn period and Holland Days in the spring period. The two events vary as the students are in different parts of their customer journey according to UNIFY CEO Milena Gencheva. Thus, it is important to tailor new events that match the parts of the customer journey (Gencheva, 2021 personal communication).

4.2.4 Performance indicators
The final stage of the professional product will consist of ways of measuring performance of the event strategy.

4. *What are ways of measuring performance of the event strategy?*

According to a report published by Aberystwyth University in 2018, it is essential to evaluate an event by taking in consideration a balance between resources (staff, time, software), event objectives (stakeholders and research questions) and respondents (sample collections and surveys). The report also states that consumer behavior and customer satisfaction are key factors when evaluating the performance of the event (Jaimangal-Jones, 2018).

Jackie Lynch also indicates the importance of measuring the event by creating SMART goals so that the company can always relate back to them during their event. She also outlines the importance of qualitative and quantitative feedback collection. Lastly, communicating the results with the team and stakeholders is also a valuable aspect of the evaluation (Lynch, 2019).

An expert interview has also been conducted to show a best practice when organizing an event. Esther Bosch describes all the important parts that need to be considered when organizing an event like the ones of UNIFY and describes the parts that need to be defined when measuring the performance (Bosch, 2021).

Lastly, Bizzabo (2021) provides 22 KPI's that can be used to track and measure the success of an event. It is described that the goals outlined before the event will guide what should be measured during the event. Furthermore, the KPI's can vary depending on the event type, as a virtual event have measurement that their counterparts do not, such as chat activity and website traffic (Bizzabo, 2021).

4.3 Findings
The following section discusses the results of the gathered knowledge.

4.3.1 Current Situation
The following chapter focuses on analyzing the current situation of UNIFY. Topics such as mission, vision and goals will be discussed. In the first stage of the professional product, the following question was outlined: *What is UNIFY currently doing when organizing events and activities for their clients?*

To serve the development of a suitable professional product it is essential to mention business characteristics such as mission, vision and strategy. UNIFY is a small consultancy agency that consists of 8 employees and has fixed offices in Sofia and Varna, but this summer an office is expected to open in Plovdiv (see Appendix 5: Organizational chart).

The mission of UNIFY is as follows: " The mission of UNIFY is to be an innovative company that offers supporting activities in the field of education. The student is our main priority and we want to facilitate and engage our students as much as possible by offering individual answers and solutions.

Our professional approach to prospective students is our main goal every year " (UNIFY, 2021). **The vision** of the company consists of two main points. First, UNIFY aims to be effective by using intelligent management. Moreover, UNIFY aims to be the best consultancy agency in Bulgaria by utilizing human resources in means of personal and professional approach, quality of services and offering a service that is free of cost (UNIFY, 2O21). **The strategy** of UNIFY is to help students in Bulgaria with the application process, but also sort out all necessary information which could be of help to the students before they leave for the Netherlands (UNIFY, 2021).

A SWOT analysis has been outlined together with the client and the main points of discussion are the strengths and weaknesses of the company (see Appendix 6: SWOT analysis). UNIFY's main strengths are as follows: knowledge and creativity of the employees, top management support and student support. Most importantly, UNIFY is the only specialized educational consultant in Bulgaria for education in the Netherlands. The main weaknesses that are outlined are: necessity for more evaluation and brainstorming, too much information provided at fairs. In a discussion with the client Mrs.Gencheva the necessity of breaking down the study programmes was also mentioned as that would decrease the stress of receiving too much information and the tunnel vision effect would be decreased (Gencheva, 2021 personal communication).

Currently, UNIFY organizes two main events called "Holland Days" – one in springtime and one in autumntime. The one that is organized in September aims to provide the students will information regarding all the study programmes and universities (considering that the registration is open from 1st of October). The second one is usually in March/April and aims to provide practical information for the students that have decided to study in the Netherlands. In between these fairs, events and activities are organized with specific universities that are partners of UNIFY.

Two online surveys were conducted as described earlier. The client Mrs.Gencheva was interested to know the platforms from where the students learn about their events. Over 100 people were reached by the survey and the results show that most people find out about the events through the website of UNIFY. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook are also popular ways of reaching clients. In fourth place comes an invitation through email (see Appendix 1: Survey results).

4.3.2 Expectations and experience of the target group
The following sections aims to answer the research question: ***What are the expectations and experience of the target group?***

The majority of the participants who took part in the survey are aged between 16-19 years old or in the grades 10th till 12th. However, the first survey that was conducted was aimed at students who are in the final stages of their customer journey and they are aged 18 or older (63%) and the rest were aged 17 or 18 (see Appendix. Q1. How old are you?). For the part below, the Saxion Matchmaking Day survey will be named S1, and the Holland Days survey will be named S2.

In general, 104 survey answers were recorded and all provide a positive experience with the services of UNIFY. The average answer to all aspects of service quality is "extremely satisfied". Hence, the respondents of the survey were "extremely satisfied" with the services and organization of UNIFY. The survey results show that the students rely on UNIFY and the organization has managed to deliver their promised value. Specifically, 93%(S2) and 88,6% (S1) of the participants chose that they are "extremely satisfied" with the overall organization of the events (see Appendix Q3. How would you rate the organization of UNIFY?). UNIFY scored high on engagement during the Holland Days with 92% of the respondents left satisfied. However, the percentage is relatively lower during the Saxion Matchmaking Day where only 68% of the respondents chose "extremely satisfied" as an option (see Appendix Q4. How would you rate the level of engagement?). The respondents from S1 indicated that they would like to see more students and lecturers from the universities present during the events (mean-90%) (see Appendix Q8: Would you like to see longer workshops with lecturers and students for specific programmes?). Most importantly, 93% of S2 want to see events organized for specific programmes in the future (see Appendix Q5: Would you be interested in an event for specific study programmes?).

To conclude, the results of these questions show that the students were "extremely satisfied" with the services of UNIFY, however, there is room for improvement of the engagement, students would like to be in contact with people already in the Netherlands and would like to be part of events that are tailored for specific study programmes.

The second part of the evaluation focuses on the preferences of the students themselves. The client wanted to figure out from where the students find out about the events. The survey results from both S1 and S2 show that 26 people found out about the two events via the website of UNIFY, 22 from Instagram, 17 from email and 16 from Facebook (see Appendix Q2: From where did you find out about the event?). It is interesting to find out that 7 people learned about the fairs from their friends (word of mouth). Furthermore, it is important to find out which platforms suit the students the most. The clients were able to select more than one option. Out of 104 respondents, 85 voted for ZOOM as their preferred platform for the fairs. DISCORD comes second in the vote with 22 respondents preferring to use this specific platform and Facebook took third place with 20 respondents. However, it is important to mention the votes for YouTube from S2, where 13 out of 73 voted that they would like to see this platform as an option for the future (see Appendix Q7: Which platforms do you prefer the most?). To conclude, students find out about the fairs predominately on the website of UNIFY and Instagram. Also, ZOOM is the most suitable platform, however, UNIFY could also look into other platforms such as YouTube and Discord for future events.

Three personas were created in correlation with the survey results (see Appendix: Personas). The parent persona was created together with the client (see Figure 3. Parent). The parent plays an important role in the customer journey of the students as they are not only mentors, but also finances the studies of their children. They are mainly interested in general information about studying abroad (Gencheva, 2021 personal communication).

The persona "Ivan" (see Figure 1. Ivan) was created in correlation with the results of the Saxion Matchmaking Day. Ivan is 18 or older and is in the last stage of the customer journey and he has decided to study in the Netherlands. He is already more critical of the information he receives as he desires clear input from both UNIFY and the universities. Most importantly, he already wants to taste what it is like to study in the Netherlands, thus he expects to be engaged by presentations and workshops. The persona "Gergana" (see Figure 2. Gergana) is aged 16-17 and unlike Ivan she seeks more information of the study choices abroad. She is yet to decide if the Netherlands is the perfect choice for her future education. The survey results show that the students in this part of the customer journey would like to see more fairs that present the study programmes separately in order to receive more specific information.

Both personas are from Generation-Z and are extremely active on social media as seen in the survey results. They seek to be informed and engaged in different platforms, but Instagram remains the top choice of the two groups of students.

4.3.3 Determine the content and message

The section below describes the findings to answer the third research question which is: ***What new content can be created to reach students each month?***

The aim of the online surveys was to figure out the interest of the students during the fairs and their preferences regarding online platforms. Most of the students have indicated that ZOOM is the best way of organizing online fairs. However, it is important to mention the votes that have been received for platforms such as Discord, Facebook and YouTube. The usage of such platforms could increase the variety when organizing online events and could be more engaging for the students. Most importantly, 93% of the respondents indicated that they would be more interested to join fairs for specific study programmes in the Netherlands. Lastly, the surveys aimed to find out the level of engagement of the students and the results varied between S1 and S2. The older students (18 and older) were somewhat satisfied when talking about engagement while the students below 18 were extremely satisfied with regards to engagement (see Appendix Q4. How would you rate the level of engagement?).

The two surveys also aimed to receive feedback regarding the overall quality of the provided content by UNIFY. The results show that the students are extremely satisfied with the level of content that is provided by the team during the presentations.

To conclude, the results of the surveys show that the students are satisfied with the usage of ZOOM as a platform for the events, however, others indicated that the usage of different platforms could be more interesting. It is important to mention the level of engagement that differs between the younger and older students. The students aged 18 or older are in the final part of their customer journey and are more critical during the online fairs, thus, it is important to focus on other ways to engage with them.

An expert interview was conducted in order to gain more insights on what content needs to be provided in a similar fair as the ones that are organized by UNIFY. According to Esther Bosch, who is a lecturer and student career counselor at the Hospitality Business School in Saxion, it is important to provide relevant content to both students and parents (Bosch, 2021). The HBS organizes its open day by splitting the two groups in order to have a conversation about the necessary topics of interest. The students are engaged with content such as workshops, study-related information and getting to know what the program is all about. On the other hand, the parents are more interested to learn about procedures, job opportunities and money. To conclude, having such a practice can create a better opportunity for both target groups to be more engaged and informed with relevant content (see Appendix 7: Interview script).

After collecting all the insights and feedback from the surveys, a creation of a draft yearly calendar has taken place. The students have indicated that they would like to be part of events that aim to promote the different study programmes separately. In this way the potential clients will have a better overview of the different choices and content provided by the Dutch universities. The draft yearly calendar can be found in Appendix 3: Draft Yearly Calendar.

4.3.4   Measuring performance

The following section will present the findings regarding the final research question: ***What are ways of measuring performance of the event strategy?***

As described in the previous sections the surveys were conducted to gain more insights and experiences from the students. They were also asked to rate the overall performance of UNIFY during the event and the results are very positive, 93% extremely satisfied (S2) and 88% extremely satisfied (S1). However, the engagement result from S1 was relatively lower than S2 (see Appendix Q3. How would you rate the organization of UNIFY?). To conclude, UNIFY received very high marks for the organization and the performance of the employees during the event, but engaging more with the audience can be an objective for future events.

According to Bizzabo (2021), there are 22 KPI's that could be out integrated during an event. It is essential to start with a key metric called event check-in to compare the numbers with total number of registrations. After each event it is important to also send out surveys to the participants in order to see the advantages and points of improvement for the next event. The evaluation of the event continues with session analytics which aims to find out which sessions were a success. Analyzing this data can determine the common themes in the top performing sessions such as topics, length and track and use these findings when outlining sessions for the next event. Lastly, the evaluation is completed with KPI's of returning attendees, generated leads and acquired customers. A high number of returning attendees shows that the created formula of the event creates value and interests the targeted audience. The next step focuses on measuring the qualified leads and in UNIFY's case, prospective clients. Logically, the last step of the evaluation focuses on acquired customers. It is important to first figure out if the lead has come from the event and not from other channels such as social media, email or a website (Bizzabo, 2021).

To conclude, using such KPI's could be a valuable asset when evaluating an event. These indicators will vary as it is key to outline and set the goals for the specific event, however, having the KPI's as a toolkit can help a company understand the most relevant metrics to the desired outcome of the event (Bizzabo, 2021).

Measuring the performance and evaluating an event is key for the future of any company. However, it is crucial to remind every employee what the mission of the company is and seeing if the values and ideals of the event lived up to the promise of the business. After approaching the situation in such a way, then it is time to look forward and evolve the current event strategy and base it on opportunities and the needs of the customers (Eventbrite, 2021). Moreover, using the SMART-goal method is a good way of creating strong objectives for an event with which you stick throughout the whole process (Lynch, 2019).

4.4 Use of results

The following chapter presents how the knowledge was used for developing the professional product. Examples and connections between the professional product and knowledge are given for a better understanding of the reader.

First, the knowledge gathered with regards to the current situation of UNIFY was used to understand how the company operates and what practices can relate to the development of the professional product. The conclusions were used to create a SWOT analysis, but on the other hand, they were used to establish the strategy of the framework. The strategy had to be aligned with the experiences and expectations of the target group. Therefore, the results of S1 and S2 were taken into consideration when developing the professional product. The students highly rated the service quality of UNIFY as a company, but also indicated that they would like to be more engaged during the online fairs. The professional product aims to indicate ways of being more interactive with the target group (see Appendix 1: Survey results).

Second, the conclusions made from the analysis of the surveys served for the creation of several parts of the professional product. The preferences of the students about online platforms and how they would like to be reached served as a base for planning the events of UNIFY. The students indicated that they mostly learn about the events from UNIFY's website and social media, thus it was confirmed that these channels should remain as the leading ones when creating the product. Moreover, ZOOM was rated as the most preferable online platform for executing the events, however, platforms such as Discord and YouTube came up as an alternative as seen in the survey results. The analysis of the online surveys was also used to create three personas. The next step taken was regarding the essence of the content which needs to reach the students during the events. The conclusions were rather positive regarding the information distributed during the events, however the students indicated that the level of engagement should be higher. The expert interview aims to show ways of increasing engagement and providing relevant information to both students and their parents. The "Best Practice" part of the product was created in correlation with the interview. Furthermore, the Draft Calendar was created based on the needs of the students to join more events for specific study programmes.

Finally, the collected knowledge to answer the fourth research question was used to set measurements and ways to rate the performance of the event strategy. The measurements were aligned with the conclusions made after analyzing the current situation and expectations of the target group. The information collected regarding the performance of UNIFY was used to create a cost table and calculate the financial feasibility of the project (see 6. Finance).

4.5 Discussion

The following chapter describes the quality of the gathered knowledge and refers to the reliability and validity of the research and sources which were used.

In order to assess the quality of the research, it is important to evaluate the reliability of the research. Reliability is the extent to which the research is free of errors (Verhoeven, 2016). A study is reliable if the research can be used at a different time, by another researcher and the results would be similar (Verhoeven, 2016).

The primary research conducted by the YP student included qualitative and quantitative research methods. As the goals of the researched topics were focused to understand the interest, opinions and personal feelings of the students, it could be concluded that the reliability of the research is affected. If

the same study is conducted in the future, the results and conclusions may vary. The reliability of the knowledge collected using the quantitative method is medium. The sample size at the end of both surveys was in total 104 students which all had valuable answers for the analysis. S1 had 43 participants out of which 31 answered the questionnaire while S2 was sent to over 500 people and 73 people answered the survey. According to Qualtrics Sample Size Calculator (2021), the ideal sample size for a population of 500 is 116. Therefore, the reliability of the quantitative research is medium.

In order to increase the reliability of the findings, the researcher implemented qualitative research methods- expert interview and active observation with help of the client. These studies were conducted with an implemented intersubjectivity as a measurement so that the results are not influenced by the opinion of the researcher (Verhoeven, 2016).

Validity is the next step in assessing the quality of the research. It identifies to what extent the research is free of systematic errors (Verhoeven, 2016).

Construct validity refers to the quality of the instruments used in the conducted research (Verhoeven, 2016). In order to ensure the construct validity of the measurements used in the study, the YP student chose only theory and literature that is from the year range 2020/21 with regards to the pandemic of Covid-19. Information taken from journals and articles did not exceed five years since publishing. The concepts studied by the researcher were operationalized using only reliable theories in order to ensure the validity of the results (Verhoeven, 2016).

The internal validity of the research refers to the quality of the conclusions of the results and factors that might affect the internal validity of the results (Verhoeven, 2016). In order to ensure the internal validity of the results, the YP student selected the population to correspond with the aim of the study. Furthermore, the surveys did not change while active which is called instrumentation and is a method of ensuring the internal validity (Verhoeven, 2016).

The external validity determines the generalizability of the results. The sample used in the research is considered to be a correct representation of the population, thus the results are externally valid. However, the sample is rather small, and the results cannot be generalized for the whole population of students. As the population consists of students in different parts of their customer journey, it is essential to conduct studies on their experience and preference each year and compare the results.

5. Stakeholders

The following chapter describes the stakeholders who are involved in the professional product. There are four key stakeholders that are directly involved within the project- the team of UNIFY, the students, the parents and the universities. The project also has an indirect impact which will be discussed in this chapter.

First, the organization of the client is the leader in implementing the professional product. The team has the role to implement the strategy and plan the events and activities in the long-term. Mrs.Gencheva emphasizes the need to brainstorm and implement new ideas in order to continue reaching their target group. During the COVID-19 pandemic the team of UNIFY have tried to be more creative in order to engage their clients. The YP student was asked to create a new framework for their event strategy for a short-term and long-term planning. As described in the previous chapters, online communities are an important factor to be considered (University of Maryland, 2020). The clients of UNIFY want to be engaged more online and require more stories from teachers and students as seen in the results of the survey (Appendix Q8: Would you like to see longer workshops with lecturers and students for specific programmes?).

The target group (GEN-Z) expect more personalized content thus, the project aims to provide a framework which will provide valuable input for a long-term planning of the content. A main benefit of such a framework is that stress within the office will decrease as more brainstorming sessions will take place and the organization of the events will be done in a right time with the correct content.

Second, the students and their parents play a vital role for the success of the company. The client has experienced a decrease of participants during the last year, mainly due to the pandemic, but also due to the decreased level of interaction and engagement. With face-to-face meetings being impossible at the time the client seeks new ways to interact with the target group. The project aims to provide more ideas to engage the clients of the company by creating more personalized events and activities (see Appendix 3: Draft Calendar). Furthermore, the project aims to provide more activities which tackle topics such as finance, cultural differences, housing etc. Decreasing the initial culture shock and stress for the students can result in a positive way for the organization of UNIFY as creating a sense of emotional comfort can create a sense of belonging within the students.

Third, the parents are also an important stakeholder that needs to be considered. Before, the parents were not really seen as a stakeholder, but that should not be in that way. According to Esther Bosch the parent figure is important as they are the mentors and the ones paying for the education of their children. Furthermore, they want the best for their kids and being involved in the journey is also important. The HBS department of Saxion organize their open day with regards to both students and parents by splitting them in two groups in order to provide the necessary information looking at the needs of the two groups (see Appendix 7: Interview script). The professional product also aims to provide information of how that can be implemented in the events and activities of UNIFY. Moreover, the team of UNIFY have created an online platform where the parents can sign up and receive information that satisfies and fulfills their needs.

Last, the universities in the Netherlands are an indirect stakeholder as they do not have a role in the professional product but are affected by the strategy. The project aims to provide a calendar where different study programmes will be presented in a specific week as already described earlier. Doing so the students will be better informed of the study choices in the Netherlands and will have less stress when applying to a specific program. Having different workshops of different programmes is a positive aspect of the project as more lecturers can provide input. Furthermore, many students tackle different problems upon arrival in the Netherlands as they have not been well informed beforehand (Gencheva, 2021 personal communication). The project aims to provide such information from study coaches, international office, current students and lecturers in the Netherlands. Therefore, less students will drop out each year due to unmet expectations and insufficient information. The team of UNIFY cannot provide such information by themselves, consequently, the universities have a responsibility to acknowledge these problems and address them during their presentations.

The YP student believes that the project has an intercultural and societal impact. The professional product contributes to one of the aspects of the Triple Bottom Line framework which was first introduced by Elkington in 1994 and looks at the 3 P's- people, planet and profit. (Kenton, 2021). The project contributes mainly to the people and it has a direct impact on the provision of equal opportunities for education. In 2011 the percentage of people in Bulgaria who were in tertiary education was 59% while in 2018 that percentage rose to 71,5% according to UNESCO. It is expected that the percentage of people who want to continue with higher education will increase further (UNESCO, 2021).

Furthermore, the professional product has an intercultural impact. Studying abroad is a trend which continues to be in the spotlight and as described earlier many Bulgarians are interested in higher education abroad and in this case, the Netherlands. According to Tracy Williams, intercultural communication is a key factor when studying abroad and her research shows that people who study abroad exhibit a greater change in their intercultural communication skills. The YP student believes that allowing students to communicate more with lecturers and students from abroad will increase their language skills and intercultural communication preparing them for life abroad. In the long-term the project will also decrease the occurrence of culture shock and stress (Williams, 2005).

6. Finance

UNIFY provides its services to the students free of charge. The information, meetings and consultations do not cost the potential students anything. Moreover, the educational fairs and events are also free of payment as the potential students only need to register to attend. The reason why UNIFY can afford to operate free of cost is because they receive commission for each student who makes it

past the first quarter in the university. Specified otherwise, the organization receives the commission only when the student continues to study after the first month of the study year (Gencheva, 2021).

The professional product aims to provide the company with resources such as content, workshops and designs. Therefore, the project is estimated to affect the cost efficiency and there will be costs for executing the event strategy. A cost-benefit analysis will be conducted in order to determine the financial feasibility of the project. The analysis starts with a calculation of the costs and ends with different success scenarios.

The costs associated with the product are presented in Table 3. Costs of the project and are an estimation made by the YP based on the execution of current events. The average gross salary per hour excluding the bonuses and benefits which the employees receive is based on the calculation – 150 lev per employee on an 8-hour working day which is approximately 10 euro an hour as calculated with the Accountant and Regional Manager of UNIFY (Katrandzhieva, 2021 personal communication). Some activities are completed by the whole team, but some will involve two or three people as discussed with Mrs.Katrandzhieva. The table represents the sum of all costs which are needed to execute such an event.

Table 3. Costs of the project

Costs	Explanation	Costs in EUR
Offer	Make offer to universities	80 €
Check with universities	8 hours	80 €
Calling students	8 people x 2 hours	160 €
Content promotion	Campaigns	160 €
Execution	Execution of 5 hours	50 €
Social media	Promotion costs	400 €
Communication	With universities	80 €
Employee work	3 people x 15 hours	150 €
Going around in Bulgaria	2 people x 16 hours	320 €
Commission	Paid to universities (3 universities)	2000 €
Total costs	-	**3480** €

On average the commission from the universities is 750€. UNIFY receive commissions from 23 universities which then sums up to an average of 17 250€.

The event strategy aims to provide the students with more fairs and events in order to show them all the possible study choices in the Netherlands. Having such an approach can create realistic expectations and provide more information for the clients. A scenario was created together with Mrs. Katrandzhieva which represents the situation if the professional product is applied. She states on average 50 to 100 people register for the educational fairs that are organized by UNIFY and five and ten of them would continue with the company as their consultant and would also apply. It is important to state that organizing two events in a month could be quite challenging and expensive as seen in the table of costs, thus it is decided that one event could take place based on the professional product (Katrandzhieva, 2021 personal communication).

Organizing an event that is specified for a certain study programme could be an advantage for the company as students who are especially interested in such a programme can join the fair and meet with the university representatives and get a better insight. The team of UNIFY believes that students who are convinced with their study choice and application results in less drop-outs during the first month. To conclude, by keeping the most prepared and motivated students there is a higher chance of conversion which results in commissions paid to UNIFY by the universities. The table below shows two possible success scenarios that could take place if the professional product is implemented but keeping

in mind the costs of organizing an event and the average commission paid (see Table.3 Costs of the project).

Table 4. Success scenarios

Name of event	Cost of event	Scenario (5 applied)	Scenario (10 applied)
The World of ICT Fair	Average of about 3480 €	3750€ commission paid. Results in 270€ profit.	7500 € commission paid. Results in 4020€ profit.

As seen in the table above both scenarios are successful and profitable for the company. As stated before, the numbers may vary depending on the study programmes and if less than five people apply with UNIFY there would not be profit. However, in the two created scenarios for one extra event a month there would be 270€ profit and can go up to 4020€ if ten people decide to apply with UNIFY. It can be concluded that implementing the project could be a benefit for the company and actually bring profit or in the worst-case break even.

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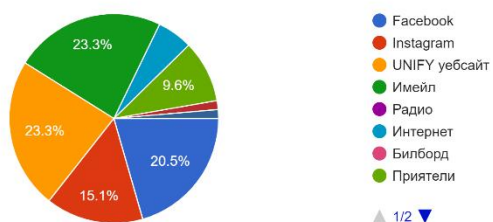Verhoeven,N. (2016). Doing Research; The Hows and Whys of Applied Research.Boom.

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Appendix 1: Survey results

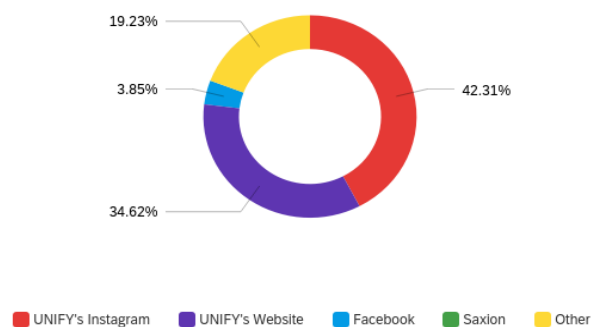Appendix Q1: How old are you?

■ 17-18   ■ 18 or older
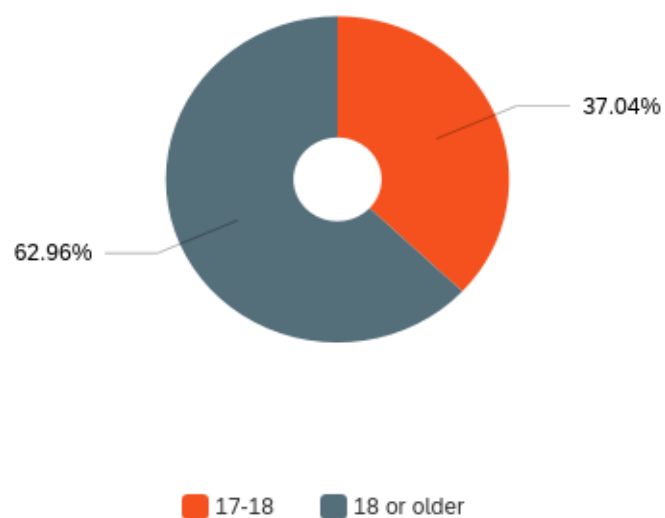
Appendix Q2: From where did you find out about the event?

Откъде научихте за събитието "Holland Days"?
73 responses

● Facebook
● Instagram
● UNIFY уебсайт
● Имейл
● Радио
● Интернет
● Билборд
● Приятели

△ 1/2 ▼
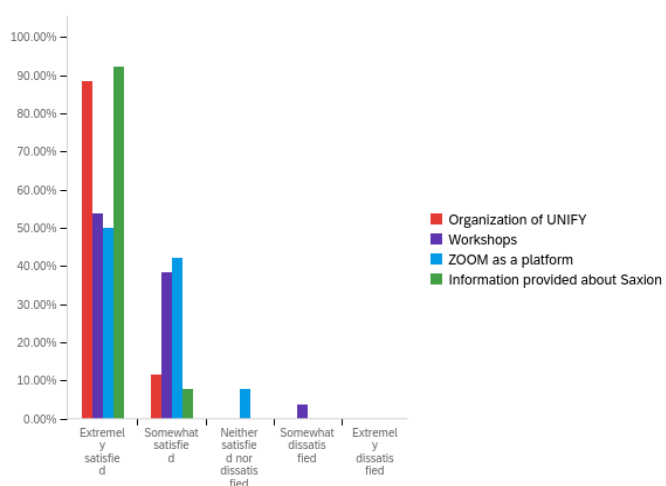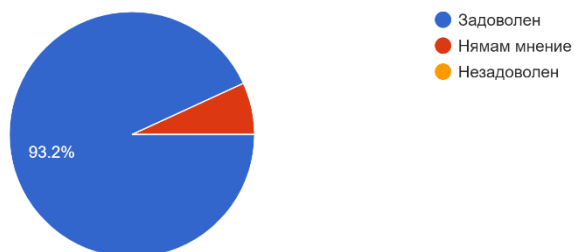
UNIFY's Instagram   UNIFY's Website   Facebook   Saxion   Other

Appendix Q3: How would you rate the organization of UNIFY?

Как бихте оценили презентациите по време на "Holland Days"?
73 responses

● Задоволен
● Нямам мнение
● Незадоволен

● Organization of UNIFY
● Workshops
● ZOOM as a platform
● Information provided about Saxion

Appendix Q4: How would you rate the level of engagement?

Беше ли събитието достатъчно интерактивно?
73 responses

- ● Да
- ● Не
- ● Нямам мнение

91.8%   8.2%

- ■ Knowledge of lecturers
- ■ Level of engagement
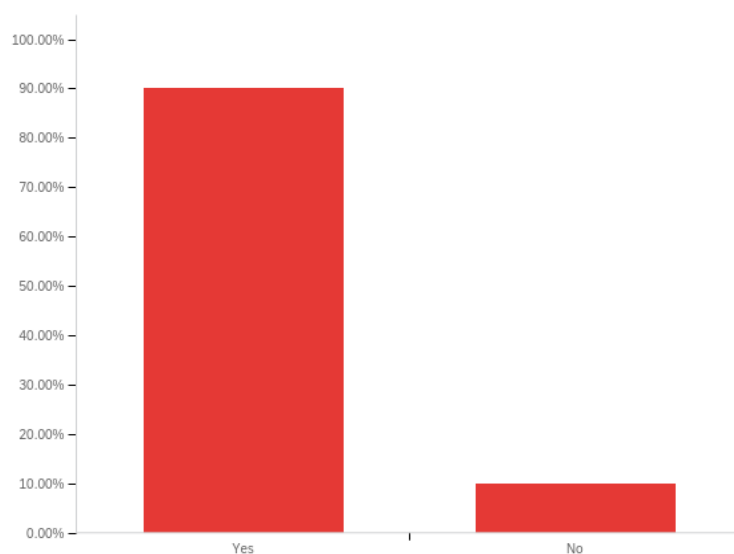- ■ Presentation skills
- ■ Length of the workshops
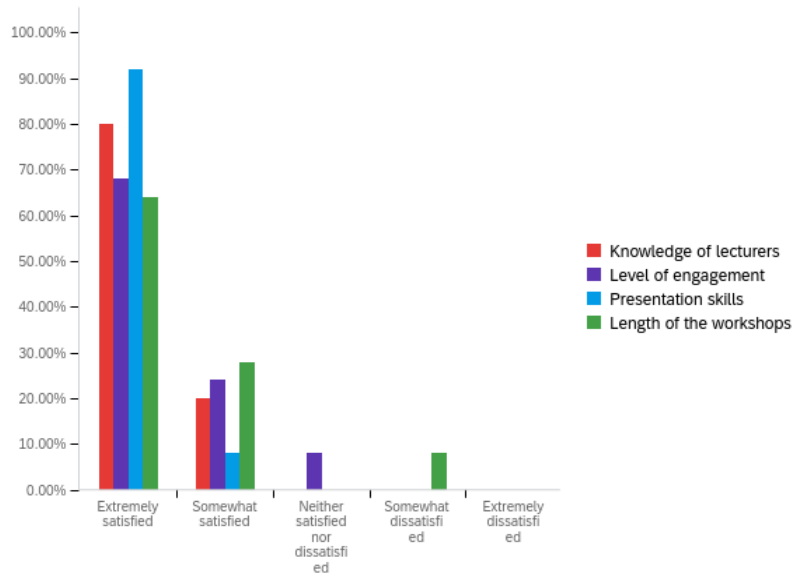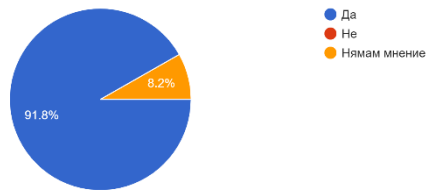
Appendix Q5: Would you be interested in an event for specific study programmes?

Би ли представлявало интерес за вас ако огранизираме събития за отделните сфери?
73 responses
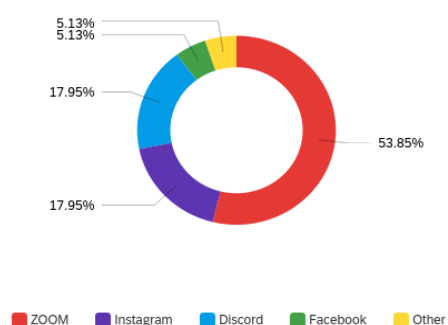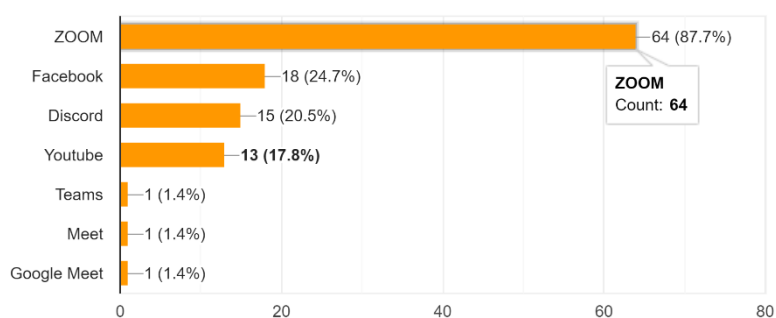

- ● Да
- ● Не
- ● Нямам мнение

93.2%
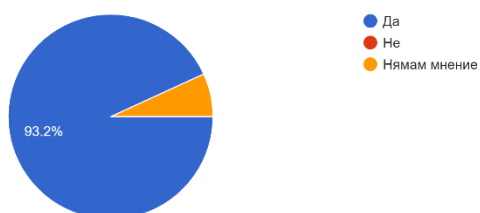
Appendix Q6: Would you like to see more students that already study in the Netherlands?

Appendix Q7: Which platforms do you prefer the most?

Предпочитана от вас платформа при онлайн събитие
73 responses

Platform	Count
ZOOM	64 (87.7%)
Facebook	18 (24.7%)
Discord	15 (20.5%)
Youtube	13 (17.8%)
Teams	1 (1.4%)
Meet	1 (1.4%)
Google Meet	1 (1.4%)

ZOOM
Count: 64

ZOOM 53.85%
Instagram 17.95%
Discord 17.95%
Facebook 5.13%
Other 5.13%

Appendix Q8: Would you like to see longer workshops with lecturers and students for specific programmes?
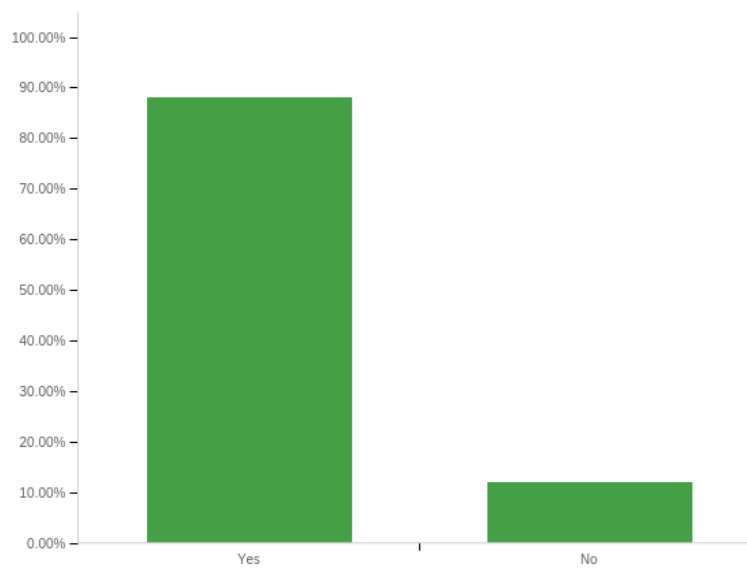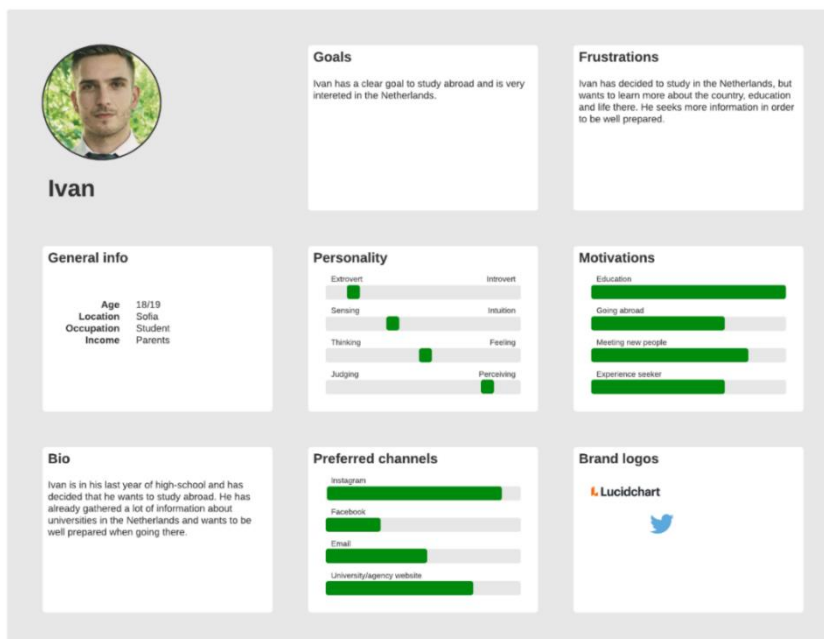
Appendix 2: Personas
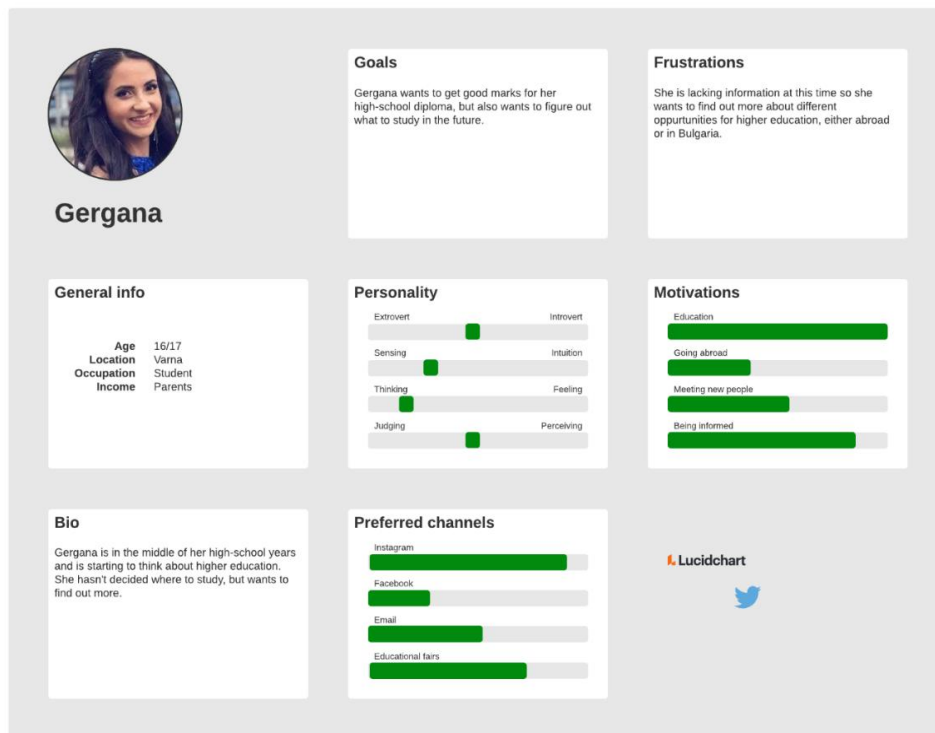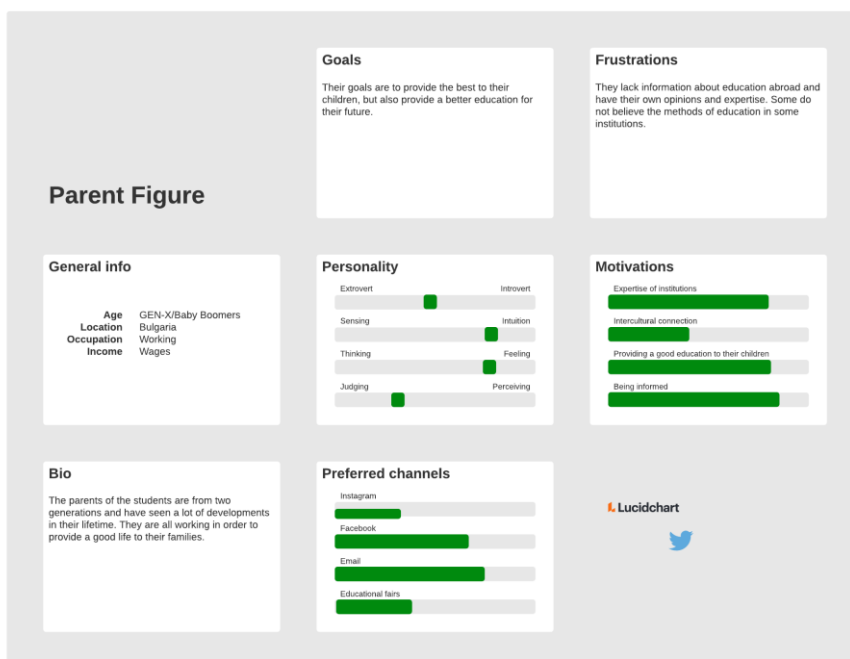
Figure 1. Ivan

Figure 2. Gergana

Figure 3. Parent

Appendix 3: Draft yearly calendar

2021

Use spinner to change the calendar year

JANUARY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

FEBRUARY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28						

MARCH

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
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APRIL

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MAY

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JUNE

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JULY

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AUGUST

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SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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IMPORTANT DATES

JANUARY
16th January Fontys Day

FEBRUARY
3rd February Windesheim Student for a day
20th February Twente Day

MARCH
4th March Saxion Matchmaking Day
17th March NHL Stenden Day

APRIL
18th April Holland Days!

MAY
29th May Holland Days Sofia, Varna and Plovdi

JUNE
5 and 6th June Predeparture Events
Opportunity for coaching
Financial presentations and workshops

August
Week of 2nd to 6th Computer Studies week
Week of 9th to 13th Tourism and Hospitality
Week of 16th to 20th Business/Finance
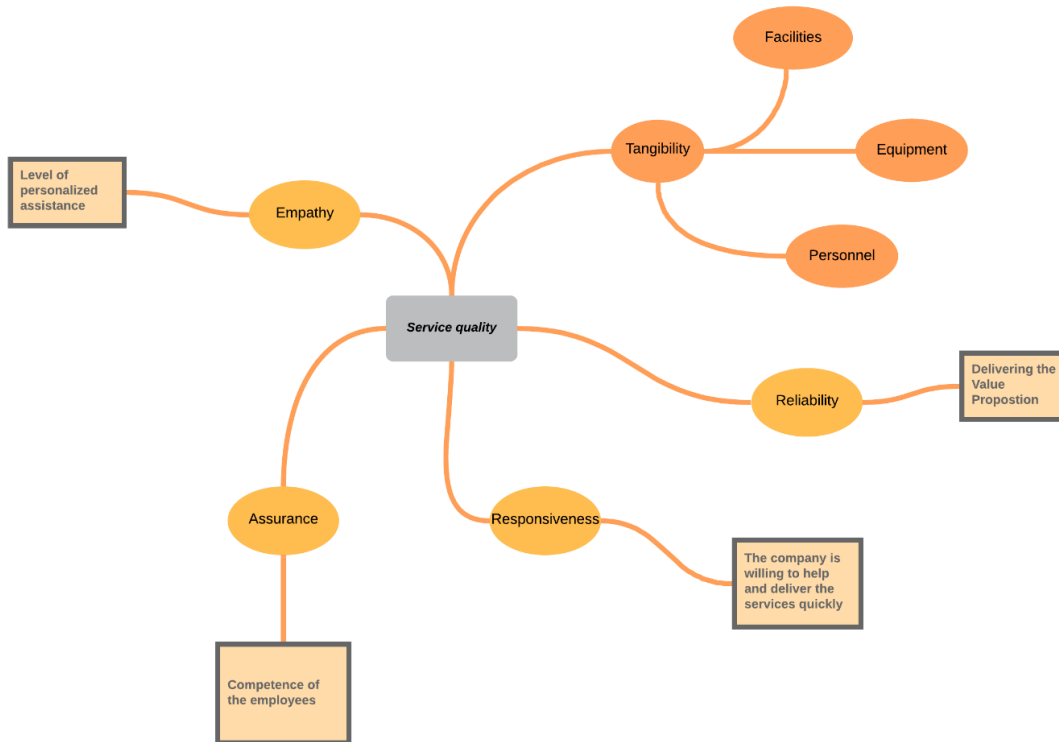Week of 23rd to 27th Sciences

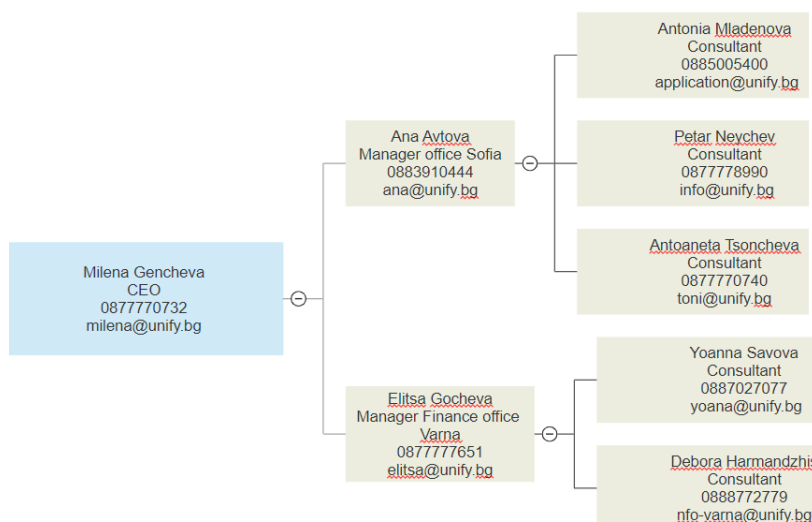**September**
24th to 26th September Holland Days

Street Address: Nikolai Haitov 2, floor 11
City, ST ZIP Code- Sofia 1113

Appendix 4: Operationalization of Service Quality

Appendix 5: Organizational chart

Appendix 6: SWOT analysis

Appendix 7: Interview script

Speaker 1: Kaloian Arnaudov

Speaker 2: Esther Bosch

00:00:03
Speaker 1: Good to see you. Well, good morning. Today, we will be talking about a very interesting topic. And now with the developments of the pandemic, of course, that is also changing. But first, I would like to say welcome to Esther Bosch. And I would like you to introduce yourself briefly.

00:00:31
Speaker 2: Well, you said my name already. I am a lecturer for tourism management. I mainly teach in the international program. I teach communicative skills. And I'm also the study career counselor for a lot of students and the coordinator of that program as well.

00:00:47
Speaker 1: All right. You said you're also a career counselor. Yes. And I think that's a very important topic also with the in the open days, which are organized. But what is the role of a study career counselor.

Speaker 2: When a student starts his study with us, he immediately is connected to a study career counselor, like a teacher from the program. And that study career counselor stays with that student for the rest of this study career. And what he does together with the study career counselor is basically talk about any decisions that he wants to or has to make during his studies, he discusses his study progress. He talks about if there are any problems that he's facing. He can always go to this person first if he has questions, so it's kind of like the mentor that the student has in the studies.

00:01:48

Speaker 1: So then I'm pretty sure you could definitely say that student coaching is quite important.

00:01:54

Speaker 2: Yeah, I would say definitely, yes. Maybe for international students even more.

00:01:59

Speaker 1: Of course, we all know that the anxious moment of arriving in the Netherlands could be quite some stress. So I could definitely agree with you on that one. Well, you are also, of course, a lecturer in the HBS. So my next question would be how important do you think hospitality is when approaching people or even when recruiting people?

00:02:26

Speaker 2: I think, first of all, you're asking somebody who is teaching at the hospitality business school. So, of course, I'm going to say that it is extremely important, but also without having my profession. I think that when you are a student from another country thinking of going to, for example, the Netherlands for studies, you're leaving your home, a place that has been your home for several years and you're going out on an adventure and you are going to study for a couple of years in a different country, which is then going to be your home for that period of time. So the job of a lecturer at any studies, for that matter, at any university in the Netherlands, has a job to make you feel welcome at the university. And by behaving in a hospitable way, by showing hospitable behavior, by trying to place yourself into the position of that student and therefore also be able to coach the student. And as I said, give him that warm welcome. I think that, yeah, you are creating a unique experience and hopefully also a pleasant one. And this is very, very important. So, yeah, to answer your question, (hospitality) is extremely important.

00:03:51

Speaker 1: So that leads to another question, would you say that the role of the student to adapt is more important, or is it the university's job, as you said, to make that person welcome? Or actually both? Because we do see times where students have problems adapting. So would you say that it's also a big role that the student has to play in the whole process?

00:04:16

Speaker 2: Of course, it's three-fold. First of all, the student is choosing himself a path for his future and he is, as we call it, an adult already. And basically we always use the word manager of his own study career. So he is the one deciding. He is the one making choices. He is the one also having to be responsible for the choices that he made. So, yes, of course, first of all, the responsibility lies with the students, but on the other hand, the university and also the teachers from the respective education studies. Yeah, they both play a role. This the school, the university in a lot of things like revolving around the whole process, application process, for example, and the lecturers in the end. This is where the student spends most time in the studies itself. So yeah.

00:05:23

Speaker 1: So it's a double-sided process. There is not one side of the story. There's always two in

that case. And of course the parents on the other side as mentors, of course. So that would lead me to my next question. We talked about already in the beginning that HBS organizes, I would say quite an unique open day, so to say.. Could you quickly tell me how that is organized? Of course, before COVID and then post COVID?

00:05:57

Speaker 2: Yeah, before COVID. What we did at a certain moment is that we saw that when students come to an open day, they usually come together with their parents, which is natural because yeah, most of the times the parents are sponsoring the studies. And you're also very curious as a parent to see what the study is, what your daughter or your son is interested in, and see if he/she is making the right choice. So they usually come together at an open day. But when they do come, we also saw that most of the time the parents were asking the questions and we were not really having a conversation with the students. And we wanted to have that conversation with the student. We wanted to also be able to educate them and inform them on their level and not on a different level. And the parents usually have different kind of questions also than the students. So, for example, the students really want to know what is it exactly that I'm going to do during the studies and what kind of work forms do you have and whom am I going to study with? And parents very much like to know more about well, procedures, about money, about job opportunities, so they have a very different view on everything. At a certain moment we decided why not split these two groups? And then we can, first of all, inform the two groups with information that they are looking for, so students would be put to work and they could really experience what it is like to study tourism management. And with the parents, we put them in a room and we had a presentation giving them all sorts of information about, well, the topics that I just mentioned, for example. So that was one goal that we had. And on the other hand, we could also really, really talk to the students like, yeah, is this really something that suits you or should you better choose something else and also engage in conversations with the students. And they were also more open then to ask questions if they were without their parents. It's a very funny phenomenon. And then, yeah, during times of COVID, of course, we could not have physical, on sight, open day. So we are doing everything online. It is completely different, I have to tell you, because we do not see the student that is sitting on the other side of the computer. We are the only ones that are visible. And we also don't know if there are parents that are listening together with the students. For example, I'm going to have an open day tomorrow together with my son. So yeah, I'm going to sit in front of the computer together with him. But the lecturer doesn't know. So, yeah, then it's mainly giving information and responding to any of the questions that the students or maybe the parents we don't also don't know that of course has and they ask the questions in the chat. So we also don't have a lot of interaction there, at least not like opening microphone, seeing each other.

00:09:07

Speaker 1: That is funny when you mention it, because you're saying how you split the two groups. And that is very good practice, which we were discussing. Now, in a very unique situation, of course, actually, it's completely different and of course people's interaction and engagement levels have really fallen. And of course, that is extremely dissatisfying for a lot of people. And I think for universities, those who created that anxious moment, not only for the parents of the students, but I do believe that having the two groups split and having focus on two different topics, obviously, because the parents as mentors, it's quite important for them to know what's the environment like in the financial aspects or housing also and so on and so forth? Yeah, I could say for myself, I mean, when I was going to fairs, it was the same when I have my parents with me. It's completely different. Of course, they all have their own perspective of what works and what does not work. So I think

splitting the two could also be a very good opportunity. But how do you think when it was offline, how would you say it works? I mean, what was the reaction of the two groups?

00:10:23
Speaker 2: Well, when this is we are one of the oldest, I think the only studies actually that does this. So everywhere that the student goes together with the parents, they are put into one room. So when they then come to our studies and they're being split up, it's like, what? Why? No, I'm with her. Yeah, OK. We know that, but yeah. So oh OK. So a lot of confusion, but afterwards they really like it and they also see that the students are being put to work. So yeah, that's also something that they will not do. So actually the most reactions are very, very positive.

00:11:09
Speaker 1: So that's quite a nice feedback regarding what you do.

00:11:13
Speaker 2: Yeah, we have been doing this for a couple of years now. I think already like three. Three, something like that. So, so far it's working like a charm.

00:11:22
Speaker 1: Great. But how do you rate the whole performance of the open day, let's say, or is there maybe a survey in the end to send to the parents of the students?

00:11:31
Speaker 2: Yeah, there is always a survey and the student can fill it out, the parent can fill it out. It's also with the online open days, they can fill out a survey. And then in the end, we always get the results. And yeah, this is also always commented on this part that they are very confused in the beginning, but they see the benefit afterwards. And one of the things that they always compliment all of us on is also our hospitable behavior. Coming back to one of your first questions. So I guess receiving those kind of compliments also shows that they also find it important.

00:12:14
Speaker 1: So would you say that this is a good practice to use for another company, for example?

00:12:19
Speaker 2: Yes, most definitely.

00:12:24
Speaker 1: There is also something in Saxion, which is called the 100th day program. Do you know more about that?

00:12:32
Speaker 2: Yes, I do. At a certain moment, we notice that, well, we have a level between high school and University of Applied Science. If you study at one of the lowest levels within high school, you can afterwards go to a higher level in high school or you can go to an applied level. And that is one step below the University of Applied Science. But we notice that if students from that level then move on to the University of Applied Science, there is quite a gap. Students were very much used to being taken by the hand in the previous studies, getting a lot of coaching and guidance on, for example, planning, learning how to study. They get a lot of how do I say that, really like tailor-made and ready-made information. And when they then enter the University of Applied Science, they have to do a lot themselves. So it's not us that take them by the hands the whole time, going through every single thing within their studies. No, they also have to take charge themselves. And was as I said, there was a huge gap and a lot of students found it very difficult, especially in year one, to try to get used to that system and to actually study successfully. So what Saxion did was draw up a program which is called the 100 Day Program, in which a student of that lower level applied level gets 100 days of sort

of training, a lot of workshops that he can choose from. In order for him to get at a certain level so that he can deal with what we do in University of Applied Science right away from day one, so there are classes about I don't know about planning or topics about learning how to study. Those are topics, but also how do they work in a University of Applied Science, you know, so it's very different. And that actually works really well in what they have now done is also formed that program into a program for our international students. It is called the onboarding program. And well, actually, it's kind of like the same. We've tried to prepare the students that are coming here from abroad. Also on, how do we actually work in the University of Applied Science and in the Netherlands? Because the way how we work in our educational system is quite different from, for example, how you are used to working in Bulgaria. Yeah. And actually we're starting with that now. And the funny thing is, is that we asked students, our students, to actually participate in that program as kind of like buddies or mentors. So they are the ones also guiding coaching, being a buddy for these international students that sign up for this onboarding program. So you basically learn it from somebody who has gone through it and knows the difficulties and can actually help you with a lot of stuff.

00:15:47
Speaker 1: Great, but that also brings me to one of my first questions when I asked you about student coaching, but it's also students coaching other students. And I think providing stories from the survivors already of the programs would definitely be a positive aspect, don't you think?

00:16:06
Speaker 2: Yeah, definitely. We also use this in our studies. We have something we call student coaches. So on one hand, we have student career counselor, on the other hand, the student coach. And this is a student from the third or the fourth year of the studies that the student receives in order to also function as some kind of coach. And you are not having conversations with the students about your study progress, that's really reserved for the study career counselor. But if you have a question, for example, how do I sign up for exams? This is something that the student has to do. But when you're new, you don't know how to do that at this student has done it before the student coach so he can help you with that. I never did it as a lecturer. I don't have to sign up for exams, luckily, so I don't want to do that. So our students are ok with that. So we also try to if there's a topic that a student can better explain to another student, then by all means, please do so and get me out of the loop, you know?

00:17:11
Speaker 1: Yes, of course. Now there's also this studentboard program which is now being made. It's in the Blackboard Environment. There is also going to be an app. And that Blackboard Environment is going to have what we call the first aid kit and in that first aid kit there will be all of the information necessary for a first year students to actually move around in Saxion. So we're talking about using the platforms like MySaxion and signing up on Bison for exams and some about using Blackboard. Further, how to fix your calendars to see other people's agendas. So there will be insurance guidebooks, I think. And that's all written by students. Right. And I think that that's the personal connection and stories given that should be provided by not only universities, but in other cases, consultancy agencies from around the world to ease off pressure from students. Because I can tell you from personal experience that going abroad for myself, being an open-minded person, was not that hard. But I've seen people struggle and that causes a lot of dropout rates. Yeah. Do you know how much is the dropout rate in the tourism management program?

00:18:35
Speaker 2: It varies a lot from year to year.

00:18:38

Speaker 1: Let's say for last year, for example.

00:18:44

Speaker 2: I think in the first year, it's definitely the highest and I think it's between 15 and 20 to twenty five percent. Usually, yeah, this year we don't have a lot, so that's good. When we see drop out, it's a lot of the times due to having made the wrong decision for the wrong study choice. But some also like, OK, I cannot, I'm not able to participate in this kind of education, you know. So yeah. That's also sometimes the reason.

00:19:24

Speaker 1: When you're talking about wrong decisions, that again brings the loop back to the open day, because then you said the parents are asking the questions. Yeah. So do you think that maybe some parents are kind of pushing their children towards a position which they say, OK, it's great for you to be an I.T. specialist, so it's great for you to be an architect and then not having the right choice made by the student herself.

00:19:50

Speaker 2: But I think there are two things important here. First of all, yes, I think that parents are most likely to look at job opportunities. I mean, I hear myself also saying things to my kids like, oh, no, don't become that because you will not earn a single penny in that kind of profession. So this is definitely important and it can also influence the choice that a person makes when it comes to his studies. But on the other hand, most kids that have to make this kind of decision are still so young. And again, I take my own children as an example. My son is 15 now and he has to choose in the coming year. So he's not even 16 then when he has to choose his next career because he is going to finish next year already in high school. And when you are so young, it's so difficult to already make a decision and think that through, but also being able to ask the right questions, because how do you know what kind of questions you have to ask, you know? So I think that here the parents also come in. And when the child doesn't really know what to choose or how to ask questions or what it is, even that he wants to know what kind of information, yet then the parent takes over and then, yeah, it's always like, well, I don't know, a gamble, a lucky guess if it is the right match or not, because we tend to know our children. But yeah. You never know. You never know. So yeah, it's difficult both ways. Yeah.

00:21:39

Speaker 1: I can totally relate to it, coming from a family with an engineering mom and architect dad. Yeah. Going in to an extremely different direction. But I would say my case has been lucky because my parents have never tried to influence my decisions. They've always been really, really behind me with everything. But I think also the role of the universities to also provide quality information and make flyers, which are interactive and interesting for the children, for the students, of course, because in the Netherlands, what I see is that kids, really, really, really young kids have to make a really tough choice. And they see a lot of people selecting from program to program, changing all the time. While here we already graduate when we are 18, 19, 20. Yeah. Where we're not talking about the teens anymore. We're talking about actually an adult. So I would say decision-making varies when it comes to international students and national students within the country, of course, which is also quite interesting.

00:22:49

Speaker 2: And the information being provided by the different studies is also important because I sometimes feel that certain studies really tried their best to promote themselves and leave out certain aspects that are also very vital for the students to know. But they don't really say that

because they want to put their studies into the spotlight. You know, indeed, we always said like we want to promote our studies from a very honest perspective. So, yeah, sample this. Well, if you go to study tourism management, economics is going to be a big part of the study. Yes, the student has to know that when he starts, because otherwise it's going to be a frustration for the students, but not only for him, also for us, you know, because in the end, you want the student to succeed. You don't want him to struggle over and over and over again, you know? So I also believe that that is very important as well, that you really tell the truth. That you tell the positive sides of your studies, but you also tell the negative sides if there are any and you really look at, OK, what kind of person are you and are you a match with us or maybe not. And then you have to have the guts to say that to a student as well.

00:24:08
Speaker 1: I totally agree with you that honesty is the first part of actually creating a good environment for the students, especially coming from so far away. We are also talking about people coming from the other parts of the world, thousands, thousands of kilometers away. So what I see within this opening day of the year is actually honesty with both groups. But then another question I would have asked is before the study choices are being made. Is there a possibility to participate in events with other consultancy agencies around the world, for example, having a special tourism management day or a special tourism management week?

00:25:00
Speaker 2: Yes!

00:25:02
Speaker 1: It would be interesting I believe that a lot of people don't know what's within the program, because obviously there is a website, there is information, you can see videos and so on and so forth. But I miss the personal connection. Yeah. And I miss that honesty. And further, I miss the student and teacher stories. For example, you had this moment last week where students come to your door with a box full of treats. So that's the hardest part because they love what this program is and they love you as a lecturer. So that's the thing. That's the honesty. That's the respect. And that's the clear vision of how there has to be a good, hospitable atmosphere within the program. And I miss that in other programs as well, because they only promote their own program without talking about any other aspects. Yeah, and I believe that a lot of lecturers do not know what's happening with the students. I don't know if you agree with me.

00:26:07
Speaker 2: So I don't want to talk bad about my colleagues, you know, but I think that well, you're talking to somebody from a very social studies, you know, as we said, hospitality business school. For us, hospitality is in our DNA and we care a great deal about a person. And we want what's best for that person. And we value personal development as well very much. And if you take all of these elements into consideration, yes, of course, we then also want you to make the right decision for your studies. So, yeah, if that isn't tourism management, well, I'm sorry that you are leaving us because then we have one student down, but I don't want to think about profit. I want to think about that. That the person itself. I think and it already starts at the beginning with giving honest and truthful information. That's where it starts.

00:27:15
Speaker 1: Great. Well we're going to leave it at that with the conclusion being honesty is quite important. Of course, giving good information, quality information, what you do it is, I would say a very, very good practice. And as you said, it could be used by others to actually ease pressure off the

target groups and stakeholders of these consultancy agencies as well. Well, thank you for your time. Thank you for the valuable information.

00:27:51
Speaker 2: You're welcome.

V. Professional Performance

**Assessment form professional performance *Progress Interview* (*to be completed by the client)*

Interview cycle Young Professional Semester

Plan interview	Progress interview	Assessment interview
Result-based agreements:	**I.r.t. result-based agreements:**	**I.r.t. result-based agreements:**
1. What does the young professional want to achieve by the end of the semester in relation to professional action? The YP student expects to develop himself as a person who is ready to start in the industry immediately. The YP student wants to be more adaptive and creative in his line of work. Furthermore, the YP student wants to understand how a company operates at all levels.	1. Can agreements made in the plan interview still exist? What, if any, needs to be changed? All of the agreements can still go through.	1. Has the young professional complied with the result-based agreement(s) from the plan interview? Yes
2. What does the young professional need (of tutor and client) to achieve this? Feedback will be key in the process. The client has agreed to provide feedback at any given moment. The tutor is part of sessions with the whole group, but is also willing to help the YP student individually.	2. What are the points of attention/development with regard to professional performance? The YP student believes that many personal and professional goals are matching together. The development of the product and conducting research has improved the YP student's adaptability and creativity. *Appendix: provisional score on professional performance, to be completed by the client*	2. What is the client's final assessment with regard to professional performance? *Appendix: definitive score on professional performance, to be completed by the client*
3. At what moments does the young professional expect to need the tutor and client? Agreements will be made about this (e.g. a (bi-)weekly meeting). The YP student has agreed to meet with the client and tutor in every two weeks for progress sessions.	3. Discussion of first ideas/design of the professional product. Is the professional product still appropriate to the question? The YP student has shared the product with the tutor and client and it is appropriate to answer the question. The client indicated some topics that still need to be researched and delivered in the final product: GEN-Z , how to use mural in events, viber or whatsapp group	3. What is the opinion with regard to (the first draft) of the professional product? –Is the client's problem solved satisfactorily? – The management question has been answered appropriately. –Is the delivered professional product suitable for the client? – The delivered professional product is suitable.

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. When will the professional product be delivered and what will be delivered? The professional product will be delivered as a draft beforehand. The final product will be a framework for an event strategy and will be delivered just before the substantiation.	4. Are the wishes of stakeholders sufficiently taken into account? The wishes of the stakeholders are taken into account.		
5. Do all parties agree with the Plan of Approach? Yes	5. Looking back on the past period and looking ahead: what has happened and what is on the planning now? The past period has been key for developing the professional product. After meeting and discussing the concept with the client it is clear that the product is innovative and answers the question. The planning for ahead aims to deliver a final product and its substantiation.		

Reporting	Plan interview	Progress interview	Assessment interview
Date interview	Monday, March 8, 2021	Thursday, May 20, 2021	Thursday, June 10, 2021
Supervisor's signature for approval			
Signature student for approval			

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Assessment form professional performance *(to be completed by the client)*

	The professional did not show the skill or attitude or particularly poorly.	The professional shows the skill or attitude at a level that does not meet the standard.	The professional shows the skill or attitude at a level that meets the standard described in this column.	The professional shows the skill or attitude at a level higher than the standard.
	0 points	1 point	2 points	3 points
6. The professional shows an investigative attitude (c.q. shows curiosity, is critical, has the will to innovate).	0 Explanation	0 Explanation	2 *The professional proactively searches for new solutions and is curious. The professional has knowledge of the latest developments in his field and applies this knowledge in the context of the issue and the organisation.*	0 Explanation
7. The professional shows hospitable behaviour towards the other person (e.g. client, colleague, guest etc.).	0 Explanation	0 Explanation	0 *The professional empathically anticipates the wishes and needs of others. The professional is friendly, helpful and takes into account the well-being of others in his actions.* Explanation	3 **The hospitable behaviour is one of the strongest characteristics of the YP. He is always very friendly, open, helpful, positive and willing to help everybody and support the activities of the company.**

	The professional did not show the skill or attitude or particularly poorly.	The professional shows the skill or attitude at a level that does not meet the standard.	The professional shows the skill or attitude at a level that meets the standard described in this column.	The professional shows the skill or attitude at a level higher than the standard.
	0 points	1 point	2 points	3 points
8. The professional communicates in a respectful, purposeful and professional manner with all internal and external stakeholders.	0 Explanation	0 Explanation	0 *The professional communicates in an appropriate and deliberate manner, both verbally and in writing, with internal and external stakeholders. In his communication, the professional uses style, tone and means(s) of communication that fit the message and the target group. The professional is a valued discussion partner.* Explanation	3 **The professional has amazing communication skills, always very professional, respectful and making employees and clients feel good. Perfect communication skills in verba land writing, externa land internal.**
9. The professional makes use of existing and new contacts and develops his professional network.	0 Explanation	0 Explanation	2 **The professional builds contacts and maintains relationships, both inside and outside the organisation, to share expertise and information, and to offer or obtain cooperation.**	0 Explanation

	The professional did not show the skill or attitude or particularly poorly.	The professional shows the skill or attitude at a level that does not meet the standard.	The professional shows the skill or attitude at a level that meets the standard described in this column.	The professional shows the skill or attitude at a level higher than the standard.
	0 points	1 point	2 points	3 points
10. The professional works effectively and efficiently with all internal and external stakeholders.	0 Toelichting	0 Toelichting	2 The professional works actively together with all internal and external stakeholders, contributing to the results of the team or organisation. The professional takes into account the interests, goals and opinions of the different stakeholders in the cooperation process.	0 Toelichting

Assessment form professional performance *Assessment Interview* (*to be completed by the client*)

	The professional did not show the skill or attitude or particularly poorly.	*The professional shows the skill or attitude at a level that does not meet the standard.*	*The professional shows the skill or attitude at a level that meets the standard described in this column.*	*The professional shows the skill or attitude at a level higher than the standard.*
	0 points	1 point	2 points	3 points
6. The professional shows an investigative attitude (c.q. shows curiosity, is critical, has the will to innovate).	0 Explanation	0 Explanation	**2 points** *The professional proactively searches for new solutions and is curious. The professional has knowledge of the latest developments in his field and applies this knowledge in the context of the issue and the organization.*	0 Explanation
7. The professional shows hospitable behaviour towards the other person (e.g. client, colleague, guest etc.).	0 Explanation	0 Explanation	0 Explanation	**3 points** **The hospitable behaviour is one of the strongest characteristics of the YP. He is always very helpful, friendly, open, positive and willing to help everybody and support the activities of the company.**

	The professional did not show the skill or attitude or particularly poorly.	The professional shows the skill or attitude at a level that does not meet the standard.	The professional shows the skill or attitude at a level that meets the standard described in this column.	The professional shows the skill or attitude at a level higher than the standard.
	0 points	1 point	2 points	3 points
8. The professional communicates in a respectful, purposeful and professional manner with all internal and external stakeholders.	0 Explanation	0 Explanation	0 Explanation	**3 points** **The professional has amazing communication skills, always very professional, respectful and making employees and clients feel good.Perfect communication skills in verbal and writing, external and internal.**
9. The professional makes use of existing and new contacts and develops his professional network.	0 Explanation	0 Explanation	**2 points** **Considering that everything is online the student could not reach the maximum points.**	0 Explanation
10. The professional works effectively and efficiently with all internal and external stakeholders.	0 Explanation	0 Explanation	0 Explanation	**3 points**