

INTERNATIONAL MASTER OF MARITIME MANAGEMENT STUDIES – HOW TO COMBINE EMPLOYERS, EMPLOYEES AND UNIVERSITY’S INTEREST?

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Abstract Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK) has now been providing a Masters programme for bachelor level Master Mariners for more than ten years in Finnish language. The results have been promising from the student’s point of view. The students who have graduated from the program have been the best earning graduates from Universities of Applied Sciences in last salary investigation made by the statistic reseachers in Finland. Among the Master level graduates from SAMK a research indicated that the Master of Maritime Management graduates had been able to benefit best of all also from their skills acquired in working life. Their employer’s satisfaction was not researched, but their best progress in working life of all SAMK graduates indicate that also employers have been satisfied. More than 75 percent of the graduates were 2 year after graduation in leading position in land organization related to shipping. The only problem was that the University get its finance from graduates and the students were able to make good progress in their studies otherwise, but they had severe difficulties in finding enough time for their mandatory Master’s thesis, which forms a half of their studies. Those students who have been able to combine their thesis with their work in an early stage have usually succeeded best and graduated in time. January this year we started the same program in English language and we needed to contradict the problem on a far greater scale. With 41 international student’s we needed to find a solution for the problem and not just make the students and their employer happy, but also the University. We needed to do that also because we will have now yearly intake of students instead of every second year, like previously. The authors made changes in the curriculum, combined the beginning of the thesis and method courses with the first course in Organization of Shipping, and integrated them. The students have to

present their organization and its structure for other students already when they come to the first contact lectures in Helsinki. The next presentation they make soon after for the authors only, through videoconference from distance, is that they need to make research in their own organization in order to find the most essential development needs. More than 90 percent of the students have already found the subject for their thesis after the presentation and confidential discussion with the authors. The next step soon after is the starting of the integrated method course. When the students already have their subject ready when they enter the method course, they get most out of it. They are able to choose the suitable methods for their research subject. As they enter the method course, they are already aware what we expect from them: A detailed research plan delivered together with their research contract between student, the employer and University – with a deadline of 3 weeks. As we have success stories by graduated students who have been able to make valuable and highly beneficial research and development work through their thesis, at least the Finnish employers have already found the value of their employee's participating in the Master's studies. Those who planned and made it work will highlight the new method in this now international program in detail in this article.

Keywords: Research in MET, e-learning, methodology in teaching.

Introduction

The Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK) has proved a Master's program for bachelor level Master Mariners for more than ten years in Finnish language. The Master studies consist of 60 credits and half of this is studies essential for the persons who want to work in a shipping company or in the maritime administration. Master programs idea is to form a "bridge" from ship to shore and give the required information on top of the STCW topics, which have already been taught to the student previously (Lempinen, 2009). The 30 credits have to be used well to be able to build the knowledge needed in land-based organization. The 30 credits have to be used effectively as they do have to support also the research that the student will do as half of the studies consists of the research.

The results have been promising from the student's point of view. Many students who have graduated in time are in leading positions in shipping companies, stevedoring companies and maritime administrations. The students who have graduated from the program have been the

best earning graduates from Universities of Applied Sciences in last salary investigation made by the statistic research in Finland. Among the Master level graduates from SAMK a research indicated that the Master of Maritime Management graduates had been able to benefit best of all also from their skills acquired in working life. Their employer's satisfaction was not researched, but their best progress in working life of all SAMK graduates indicate that also employers have been satisfied. More than 75 percent of the graduates were 2 year after graduation in leading position in land organization related to shipping.

Connecting the employers and employee to thesis

Although the master program has been successful, the problem is that the University get its finance from graduates and the students were able to make good progress in their studies otherwise, but they had severe difficulties in finding enough time for their mandatory Master's thesis, which forms a half of their studies. Those students who have been able to combine their thesis with their work in an early stage have usually succeeded best and graduated in time. January this year we started the same program in English language and we needed to contradict the problem on a far greater scale. With 40 international student's, we needed to find a solution for the problem and not just make the students and their employer happy - But also the University. We needed to do that also because of the popularity of the Master's program. We will have now yearly intake of students instead of every second year, like previously.

The authors of this article made changes in the curriculum, combined the beginning of the thesis and method courses with the first course in Organization of Shipping, and integrated them. The students had to present their organization and its structure for other students already when they came to the first contact lectures in Helsinki. The next presentation they made soon after for the authors only, through videoconference from distance, was that they needed to make research in their own organization in order to find the most essential development needs. There was a clear difference and effect - More than 90 percent of the students have already found the subject for their thesis after the presentation and confidential discussions with the authors. The only students who still after this exercise and confidential discussions did not a topic, were those who did not for some reason want to tie their thesis to their employer. Reasons for this vary – Some students have already found new employer who

still is not familiar enough in order to provide subject for the thesis or the employee is not familiar with his/her work or company's development needs.

After evaluation of the thesis subjects the students have discovered, there is a clear finding. The employers in general have offered demanding development topics for the students. There is clearly two main reasons for this: 1) when the students were given an assignment to study development needs of the company, most of them took it seriously enough and contacted the management of the company on a high level, They had clearly indicated that they have something to offer and they have University support for their efforts. The message was that the development work needs to be something more than what is generally done at the bachelor level studies. 2) The other reason is two folded. First the students are already known to have expertise which is highly useful for the company's purposes and secondly, the employers have become better aware of the Master program itself and the purpose of the thesis work as a large part of it. For this we need to thank our graduates and the reputation they have gained in working life over the years.

Method course integration into thesis

The next step after the thesis subject had been chosen, was to start the integrated method course. When the students already have their subject ready when they enter the method course, they get most out of it. Students are able to choose the suitable methods for their research subject when their topic has already been chosen. As they enter the method course, they are already aware what we expect from them: A detailed research plan delivered together with their research contract between student, the employer and University.

As we have success stories by graduated students who have been able to make valuable and highly beneficial research and development work through their thesis, at least the Finnish employers have clearly found the value of their employee in participating in the Master's studies.

One ship owner needs to be mentioned especially – Finnlines, although owned by Italian Grimaldi family, the management team of the company in Finland was immediately prepared to offer valuable and interesting topics for the students to develop. This also envisages that the

communication in the company group works well. The daughter company Finnsteve Ltd. had previously gained excellent results when their management level persons had studied in the Master degree program and connected their thesis with their work. (Innovations in maritime research through co-operation between University and employer of the student writing his/her master thesis, 2015)

The roles of the companies and University in promoting the students together is crucial. (Lempinen, 2009) Contact with not just students, but also their employers is vital for successful result. It is important that the methodology is not accepted and understood by the employer's representative. Therefore, this needs to be certified. This is done by the students agreement which consists also the thesis Plan, where the methodology, which the student will use in his/her development work/research, is described in the thesis plan which is also signed together with the agreement, by the employer, student and the University.

The support from the alumni's

When the students have their thesis subject, thesis plan and methodology chosen it is time to take the next step. To act according to the thesis plan and to begin the real work. Supported by the employer and supervisors they will get on their way. However, there is still need for additional support, which the alumnies can provide. (Sandell, 2014) We have previously used the best alumnis by providing the new student group a day together with the best students from previous group.

The core idea of this practice is to bring together the students, which are in the beginning of their studies, the graduating students and some of the alumnies. The student's employers are also invited to the seminar day to hear the best and latest research results from the graduating students. The seminar day is organized to fulfill several goals. First of all, it is important way to bring the new research to the knowledge of all students and their employers who are also free to participate in the seminar. Secondly, it is organized for the students and the alumni's to be able to network with each other. Thirdly, the students who are now in the beginning phase of their studies, are able to hear concrete stories how the best students have conducted their research work together with their employers and University. It is also important for them to hear how they have planned their studies and been able to connect it to their work, and

connected and scheduled this with their family life. Hearing how they have overcome all the difficulties and how they have won their obstacles in research helps those in the beginning of the research.

This practice has previously been essential for the students and helped them onwards in their research process. The students have been able to make their thesis plans more concrete in an early phase of the research. After the day with the alumni's, the students start to prepare the thesis and collect the materials, prepare the interviews etc. After this he/she presents the research materials and how he/she is going to apply the chosen research methods to the materials and the development work. This seminar is organized with the fellow students present. In these seminars the students discuss and change opinions how to apply the research methods, how to conduct surveys, interviews etc. and they will be commented by the supervisors and fellow students.

Conclusions

Thesis in Master programs is a development work, which is usually combined to developing ship owner's business. They are often combined tightly to the activities, which the ship owner should carry out and invest in anyway. During the studies, the ship owner's employee receives support in development work from the University that helps to develop the business and solve the problems. This benefits also the teachers as supervisors as they gain knowledge that they would not normally get just by doing research in their chambers and lecturing in class.

Effective combining of the students, their employer and the University demands a lot of efforts and work. But it gives also a lot for all. In this Master program, the program itself has been a development work itself, which has taken ten years this far. The development work of the program is still not finished and but general understanding of the objectives by the employers has helped the process especially in recent years as well as the results and progress of the alumni's in the shipping world. In addition, the research results conducted by the students advertises the study program when they are constantly used to enhance maritime safety and efficiency of the industry when the results are implemented to the work in shipping companies and maritime administration.

References

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