

ROTTERDAM SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, ERASMUS UNIVERSITY

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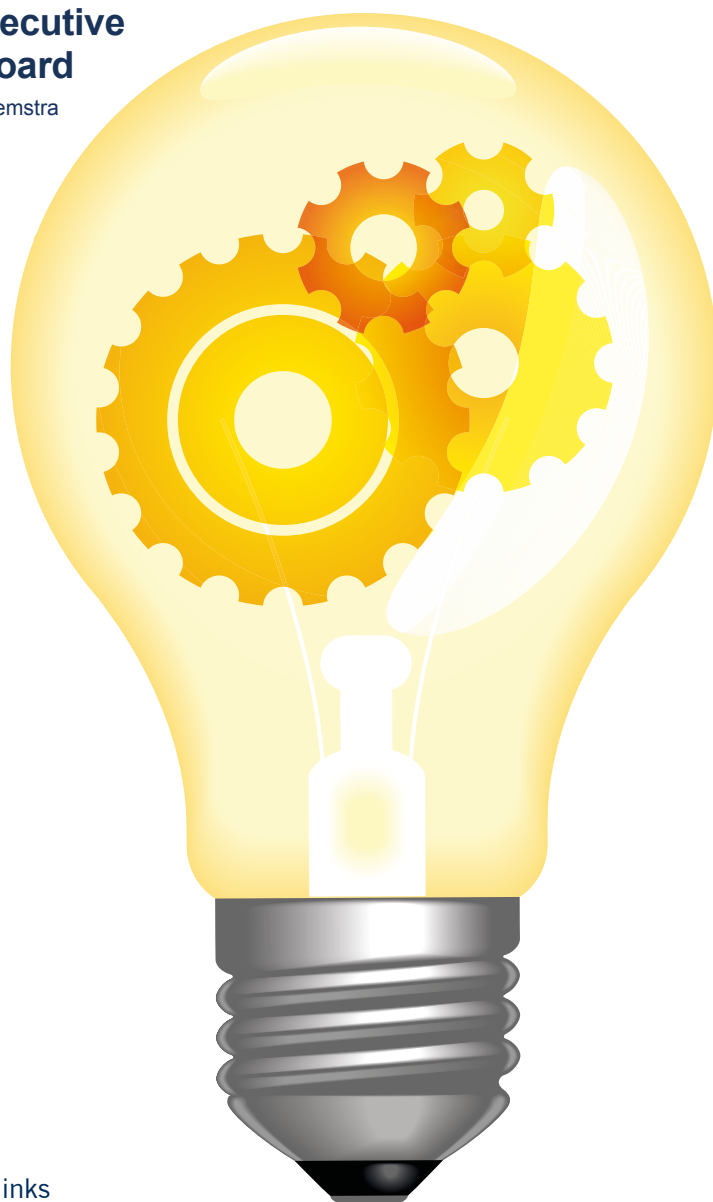
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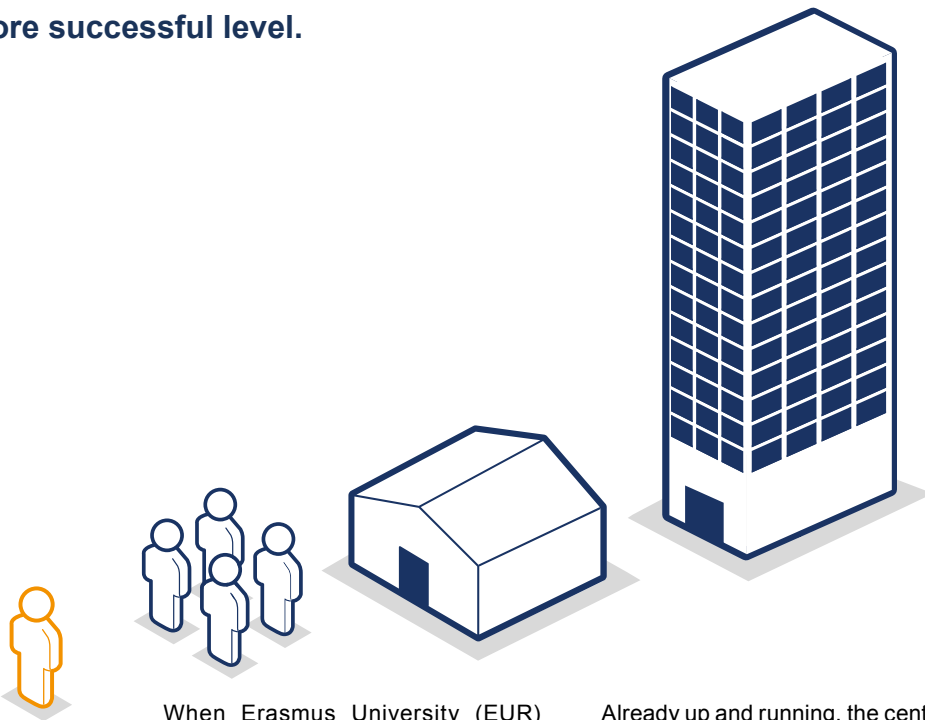


The business school that thinks and lives in the future

Bringing focus to entrepreneurship

Tim Skelton interviews Justin Jansen

Fostering entrepreneurship has long been a core part of the RSM ethos. But a new centre bringing together some key players promises to take this philosophy to a new and even more successful level.



When Erasmus University (EUR) was founded back in 1913, its stated ambition was to improve education for entrepreneurs and the wider business community. And now, appropriately enough almost exactly a century later, the Erasmus Centre for Entrepreneurship (ECE) has been created to focus and concentrate its undoubted expertise in this field. The plan is to further the understanding of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs, and in so doing to benefit the Dutch economy as a whole.

Already up and running, the centre will receive its official launch on October 10, at the inaugural Erasmus Entrepreneurship Congress, which will be held in Rotterdam.

But why is entrepreneurship so important economically, and why should it be encouraged? One of the new centre's Scientific Directors, RSM Professor Justin Jansen, explains. 'It's one of the main drivers of economic growth,' he says. 'Growth depends on how we respond to the challenges we face, both from an economic and an

environmental viewpoint. To grow you need innovation and novel approaches, and entrepreneurship underlies that.'

Creating impact

Various EUR schools, not least among them RSM, already cover entrepreneurship in many of their other educational and research programmes. So why was the centre seen as a necessary addition to the fold? 'Erasmus University is known for its facilities, and we are the biggest centre of entrepreneurship in the Netherlands, possibly even in the whole of Europe,' Professor Jansen agrees. 'Our role, like the role of any university, is to look at how we can contribute to economic growth. It's not just about inspiring our students, but also about translating entrepreneurship into economic policy and new management approaches. The principal idea behind the centre was to create more of an impact with this.'

The ECE's big selling point is that it attempts to combine all the available resources. The joint initiative of both RSM and the Erasmus School of Economics (ESE), its principal strength comes from the pooling of their different areas of expertise. 'ESE has always focused more on the implications for economic policy, whereas RSM has dealt more with the inside of the organisations, both small ▶

Bringing focus to entrepreneurship (continued)

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and large,' Jansen says. By tapping into the strengths and skills of both schools, the centre is able to make more of an impact, he adds. 'It also makes EUR as a whole stand out more, and shows the business world it's a good place to find out more.'

In other words, the centre is designed to operate as a single unified gateway to all of EUR's fields of entrepreneurial excellence. In the past, EUR had offered the world a more diffuse – and thus less effective – entrepreneurial face, in the form of its individual schools.

This collection of knowledge is supplemented even further through collaborations with Delft University of Technology (TU Delft), and with Leiden University through the Holland Programme on Entrepreneurship (HOPE). This links together all academic entrepreneurship activities throughout the entire province of South Holland.

Stimulate and educate

The centre's underlying belief is that the Netherlands has the potential to become a leading knowledge-driven economy, but it recognises that achieving this requires the national workforce to adopt a more entrepreneurial and creative approach. Dutch universities face the challenge of preparing and stimulating society to use its knowledge and skills in more

entrepreneurial and creative ways. The centre's stated mission is therefore to 'inspire, educate and support tomorrow's leading entrepreneurs', by stimulating entrepreneurial behaviour, and by 'fostering ambitious and innovative entrepreneurship'.

'We want to accelerate growth in the Dutch business world,' Professor Jansen explains. 'In the Netherlands there are many start-ups (zzp'ers), but most remain very small, usually one-person companies. Our idea is to help stimulate them, to grow them into companies with 50 or perhaps 100 employees.'

It's a worthy ambition that would certainly boost the economy. So how does the centre plan to go about achieving this? 'We focus on three distinct areas: research, education and support,' Jansen says. 'Research is the main pillar of what we do, because it

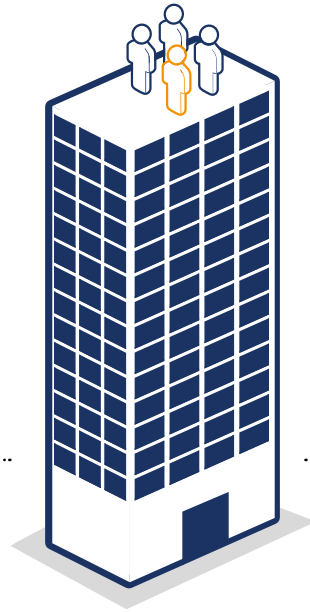
builds insight for the education and support angles of our work.'

Education is important, he adds. Therefore the centre offers two Minor programmes. The first, Entrepreneurship and New Business Venturing, is offered by RSM, and

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is about launching and building successful new business ventures. The other, Entrepreneurship in the Modern Economy, is offered by ESE, and gives students the opportunity to dig deeper into the world of entrepreneurship and its many aspects.

Students come to study these Minors not only from EUR, but also from other Dutch universities. 'We teach our students how to develop business plans, something that is perhaps more important for those who come from the more technical universities, since EUR already has a business focus' Jansen says.



Besides the Minor programme, ECE also offers two Masters programmes. Again, one programme is offered by each of the two participating schools. There are also post-initial education programmes. 'Alumni might be working in a big organisation, but may also want to start out with their own company,' Professor Jansen explains. 'We help to enable these corporate entrepreneurs through training programmes and Masterclasses.'

Easy networking

Beyond teaching, the centre offers support to new entrepreneurs in other ways, by providing practical programmes for start-ups and big organisations alike. 'We bring start-ups together with serial entrepreneurs,' Jansen says. 'The latter have been through it all before and know what can go wrong, so they can offer insight and advice for budding entrepreneurs.'

This form of easy networking can be invaluable. 'Big organisations can sometimes get stuck coming up with new products and services,' Jansen continues. 'The research side of our centre is more academically angled, but our education and support programmes can help them out. We provide 10-day post education programmes and support programmes. Entrepreneurs can rent office space in our Science Tower. There they can

get together with other start-ups and entrepreneurs and can learn from each other and share experiences.'

Around 20 start-ups are currently working in the Science Tower, located just west of Delfshaven in Rotterdam. Together they form a Startup Campus, where they can interact with one another, with other alumni, and with in-house experts and advisors.

Underpinning the three key pillars of education, research and support are the many events the centre organises. One is the above-mentioned Erasmus Entrepreneurship Congress, which is intended as an annual event, bringing together top business people, entrepreneurs, and politicians to share their insight.

Another is 'Get in the Ring', an international competition initiated by the ECE. In this, entrepreneurs compete to secure an investment of up to one million euros, but they have to go about it in an eye-catching way. To add to the sense of battle, the contestants pitch their ideas in front of prominent international investors - in an actual boxing ring. The heats are held globally, and the finals will take place in Rotterdam each year.

'Before EUR focused its entrepreneurship efforts in the ECE, we were never able to organise such large conferences and events,' Professor Jansen points out. 'Thus

the centre allows us to make more of an impact in both the educational and business worlds.'

As the centre gets into its stride in the coming years, its unofficial ambition is to grow to become one of the top three centres for entrepreneurship in Europe. But according to Professor Jansen the focus will remain on accelerating growth, and on researching how this can be achieved. 'All economies need growing companies, so we are looking at what separates these from small one-person start-ups who are happy simply to earn enough,' he says. 'We are looking at how we can support their growth and what we can do for our students to strengthen their ambitions. We want them to know there are opportunities out there for them, and to show them how they can make the most of these.' ■

In addition to being one of the Erasmus Centre for Entrepreneurship's Scientific Directors, Justin Jansen is also Professor of Corporate Entrepreneurship.

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Erasmus Entrepreneurship Congress

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