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A Dutch university: Providing a competitive advantage

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The Rotterdam School of Management (RSM) of the Erasmus University in The Netherlands is an internationally top-ranked business school focussed on developing leaders for global, sustainable business. Offering an array of Bachelor's (BA), Mas-

About the author



Henk J. de Vries has been an Associate Professor in Standardization at the RSM Erasmus University since 2003. From 1994 to 2003, he worked as

Assistant Professor at Erasmus University and simultaneously had a position at the Netherlands Standardization Institute (NEN). He wrote his dissertation on national standards bodies (Henk J. de Vries, 1999. *Standardization – A Business Approach to the Role of National Standardization Organizations*. Boston/Dordrecht/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers). He is the author of more than 200 publications on standardization.

ter's (MA) and executive education (MBA) programmes, it is one of the world's largest business schools in the number of both students and research faculty. In order to achieve and maintain its top rank, the school benchmarks both its educational and research activities against other major business schools. Ultimately, the objective of the RSM Erasmus University is not only to be active in the more "common" aspects of business, but to distinguish itself by addressing business issues not considered by other schools. Standardization management is one of these issues.

Bachelor's students' A to Z for strategic research

RSM Erasmus University offers several elective courses with standardization management as the main or one of the topics addressed. In their third year, students write a Bachelor thesis in groups of three. The objective is for students to learn how to design, conduct and report a research project. Each year, 24 students devote their thesis to "standardization strategy", so as to obtain a general overview of the subject and the necessary knowledge and skills to develop a standardization

strategy for an organization or group of organizations.

Students learn about standardization through self-study of the management book on standardization developed by the school, as well as presentations and in-class discussions. Research topics differ per group. Past theses have included themes as varied as mass customization of jeans, professional soccer licensing, and product quality of cannabis (see **Box, overleaf**, for more examples).

"Past theses have included themes as varied as mass customization of jeans and professional soccer licensing."



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The research groups have to review relevant scientific and professional literature, and most will have to interview practitioners. Some groups use additional research and statistical methods for gathering data, such as street interviews with consumers or internet surveys. The findings are then presented to a jury consisting of an RSM Erasmus University researcher, as well as the General Director and the Head of New Business Development of NEN, the ISO member body for The Netherlands (The Netherlands Standardization Institute). Some students have managed to get their results published in professional journals, and one group wrote their thesis as a scientific paper which was accepted for a scientific conference of the European Academy for Standardization (EURAS).

Masters in the classroom

Standardization is also part of the courses within the Master electives on “Business Process Excellence” and “Innovation in Services”. As of 2008, RSM Erasmus University intends to offer a new elective on standardization management. The Master electives are given in English and are also open to students from 61 partner business schools all over the world.

“At the RSM Erasmus University, research and education are interrelated, and developed in cooperation with industry.”

In 2006, 22 students devoted their Master’s thesis to standardization. In most cases, the thesis project was combined with an internship in a company or other organization. Thesis topics included:

- Effects of job standardization on sales force turnover – The case of Nike Europe
- Impact of ISO 9001:2000 on product innovation
- Implementing a standardized distribution model for multinational companies – The case of General Electric Plastics
- Standards for outsourcing of business services
- Dominant design or multiple designs? – A case study on factors contributing to multiple designs in the Flash Memory Card Industry
- Implementing the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) food safety standard in a small company

Numerous articles based on Master’s theses have been published in professional and scientific journals. Some students have received first and second places in national thesis awards on service and quality management.

Jeans, soccer and cannabis

The following are examples of standardization thesis topics chosen by students at the RSM Erasmus University:

- Consumer preferences related to mass customization – The case of jeans
- Process standardization in the manufacturing of cars
- Application of RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) in (medical) emergency treatment
- Professional soccer – UEFA licensing system
- Biometric identification cards – Benchmarking study Malaysia – Netherlands
- Factors for standards dominance – A literature review
- Standards for geothermic energy
- Product quality of cannabis – Standardization in a semi-criminal environment
- Performance standards for development agencies
- Marks of conformity – Added value of certification and accreditation – The case of food product logos
- Standards for public procurement of road construction
- Stakeholder involvement in the development of standards – Cases on International Financial Reporting Standards and European standards for protective clothing

ISO Member for The Netherlands paves the way

The RSM Erasmus University’s Chair in Standardization within the department of Management of Technology and Innovation has been made possible by NEN. Currently there is a vacancy for a Professor in Standardization, previously held by Prof.dr.ir. C.A.J. Simons (1994-2000) and Prof.dr. A.J. Feilzer (2001-2006).

NEN’s support has enabled the Chair to get involved in the advancement of standardization education outside RSM Erasmus University. These activities include developing teaching materials (books, teaching cases, e-learning modules), coordinating an academic network of standardization researchers in The Netherlands, and actively participating in the International Committee for Education about Standardization (ICES) (See the article on page 25) and in the Asia Link project on Standardization in Companies and Markets (See the article on page 21).

At RSM Erasmus University, research and education are interrelated, and developed in cooperation with industry. Current research includes the supervision of four PhD projects on standardization. These and other research activities have resulted in more than 200 publications, including several books. ■

For more information, see:

- <http://www.rsm.nl/standardization>
- <http://www.rsm.nl/hdevries>

Publications on the school’s activities in standardization education include:

- Vries, Dr. Henk J. de, 2003. *Learning by example – a possible curriculum model for standardization education*. *ISO Bulletin*, 34, 7, July 2003, 25-30.
- Vries, Henk J. de, 2005. *Standardization Education*. In: Manfred J. Holler & Esko Niskanen (Eds.) *EURAS Yearbook of Standardization*, Vol. 5. Special issue of *Homo Oeconomicus*, 22, 1, 71-91.