Ambition driven entrepreneurship in higher education

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Han van der Meer
Erik Wierstra
Janneke Boeije
Saxion University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands
**Han van der Meer** is partner of van der Meer en Van Tilburg management consultants for innovation and growth since 1979, ABN-AMRO chair innovative entrepreneurship at Saxion University, member of SKIO and associated professor at Technical University Delft.

**Erik Wierstra** is ABN-AMRO chair innovative entrepreneurship at Saxion University, member SKIO and lecturer/coordinator entrepreneurship track faculty ABR of Saxion University.

**Janneke Boeije** is a bachelor Psychology and Educational Sciences at the University of Twente, and has been working at the Saxion Knowledge centre Innovation and Entrepreneurship as researcher since 2007.

**Saxion Knowledge centre Innovation and Entrepreneurship (SKIO)**
Saxion Knowledge centre Innovation and Entrepreneurship (Saxion Kenniscentrum Innovatie & Ondernemerschap) has the aspiration to stimulate and facilitate entrepreneurship within Saxion Hogescholen. The target is to increase the number of starting enterprises as well as its quality in the Eastern region of Holland. The centre wants to give an impulse to the embedding and anchoring of competencies on the domain of entrepreneurship in the curricula of the courses given at the Saxion University. Additionally, a knowledge circulation with the business world is taking place, in which research is conducted and consultancy is offered.
Abstract

In this paper the results of a broad survey under all students (response 69%, n=12,481) and management of all faculties of Saxion University will be presented. Saxion is a university of applied sciences located in the East of the Netherlands with 18,000 students divided over 13 faculties and 64 studies. The survey was held in the summer of 2007 and will be repeated for several years. It is shown that the interest of students to start their own company is large (over 55% in the general population) and varies over the several faculties (range 13% - 81%). A total number of 287 student companies is identified for further in depth study. Some of these cases of student companies are included in the paper. The total number of student companies at Saxion University can be estimated at 415. Based on the results of the survey a funnel type of approach is suggested to boost the number and quality of the Saxion University spin off firms to reach a total number to a turnover of 250 companies a year, to double the recent output since this doubling is the ambition of the management of Saxion University. A rather traditional approach of stimulating measures is the backbone of this funnel but the philosophy behind it is going much deeper. The authors suggest to use a model for the development of a spin off company based on three independent sub processes:
- development of formula
- development of organization
- development of ambition

The most important sub process here is the development of ambition. One of the basic rules of supporting instruments should be the nurturing of the real and deep ambition of the young entrepreneur. This may seem in contrast with the more traditional supporting instruments like providing shovel money and helping to make a business plan. New instruments should be developed to nurture and stimulate ambition. But first of all: When a university wants to attract ambitious young entrepreneurial students it starts with the ambition of the university itself.
Introduction

Entrepreneurship is seen as an important phenomenon to strengthen the growth of regional economy (van der Meer, 2007; van der Veen & Wakkee 2002-2003). Next to the growth motive, some authors, like Groen and Van der Sijde (2004) report also the powerful contribution of the transfer of knowledge and the improvement of educational systems. In the Netherlands most of the Universities like Saxion University see the importance of entrepreneurship and spin-off companies and have an explicit policy to stimulate entrepreneurship. To find out the effects and efficiency of the present policy instruments and to develop new policy, Saxion University made an investigation intro entrepreneurship in summer 2007 (Van den Berg, Bijleveld, Van der Meer, De Weerd & Wierstra, 2008). In this paper we will show some of the results of this study and we will propose a framework for further research.

Method

Six different forms of approaches are used in this research:

- Survey of students (n=12,481)
- Interviews with the board of directors of every faculty (n=13)
- Workshop management of faculties (n=28)
- Casestudies (n=14)
- Survey of Saxion Young Business Professionals (YBP) entrepreneurs (n=37)
- Literature search.

All current students, which are subscribed to Saxion Universities for academic year 2007-2008, have received a postal survey together with their subscription form, resulting in the excellent response of 69%. Eventually 12,481 surveys are processed. The non-response investigation shows that the sample is representative for the total target group of 18,500 students, which is subscribed. The size of the response enables us to make detailed analyses. The results of the survey can be related by student numbers to already known student data (place of residence, age and preliminary education), so deeper analysis is possible.

The next source involves a series of interviews among the board of directors of every faculty. The result of these interviews is supplemented with observations during workshops and information from conversation with the management of several academies. Considering the journalistic approach of these interviews and conversations, the results should be seen as opinions.

During this research, a start is made with the development of a database with Saxion enterprises. A Saxion enterprise is understood to mean:

_A company that is (partly) established, or (partly) acquired, by a student or an employee from Saxion Hogescholen, during school time or hours of duty, and within 5 years after leaving the institute._

The sources for the names of the Saxion Enterprises are various. By way of the YBP (the student entrepreneurs association of Saxion University) 37 enterprises were traced out.
12 Came out of interviews with the board of directors, and the remaining enterprises came out of sources like employees and the press. In spring 2007 the database contained a modest 68 companies of which 14 are extensively interviewed. This case material is used particularly for the purpose of illustration. Meanwhile the database has grown to 420 companies and web-based surveys of additional research questions are prepared to be executed in spring 2008.

**Results**

Saxion is a university of applied sciences located in the East of the Netherlands with 18,000 students divided over 13 faculties and 64 studies, as shown in figure 1.

![The 13 faculties of Saxion University](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Name faculty</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABO</td>
<td>Faculty Business Administration &amp; Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>1229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIM</td>
<td>Faculty Marketing &amp; Internationaal Management</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBS</td>
<td>Hospitality Business School</td>
<td>1643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEM</td>
<td>Faculty Finance, Economics &amp; Management</td>
<td>963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROB</td>
<td>Faculty Environmental Planning &amp; Construction</td>
<td>1146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TKT</td>
<td>Faculty Applied Art &amp; Technique</td>
<td>995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABR</td>
<td>Faculty Government &amp; Law</td>
<td>1409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CII</td>
<td>Faculty Communication, Information technology &amp; Information management</td>
<td>1008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LED</td>
<td>Faculty Life Science, Engineering &amp; Design</td>
<td>1719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMA</td>
<td>Faculty People &amp; Work</td>
<td>1469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGZ</td>
<td>Faculty Health Care</td>
<td>1773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMM</td>
<td>Faculty People &amp; Society</td>
<td>2114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APO</td>
<td>Faculty Pedagogics &amp; Education</td>
<td>693</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Results on interest in entrepreneurship**

The importance of entrepreneurship is valued high within Saxion University. As much as 47% of all students is interested in the subject of entrepreneurship (figure 2), and an even larger percentage of 55% is intending to (maybe) start an own enterprise (figure 3). Apparently, students from Saxion University are more inclined to actually start an enterprise than being interested in the phenomenon Entrepreneurship in general!
In the first measurement among all students, we notice a small decrease in interest, as a student is subscribed for a longer time (figure 4). Here the question arises whether this decrease can be attributed to the progress in study, or to the interest of young students in general. The subject of entrepreneurship is getting a lot of publicity last years, compared with the years before that. Therefore, probably the first year students are influenced by this publicity.

The image of students attaching great importance to entrepreneurship is confirmed by the image the board of directors and management of the faculties have. Here as well, importance of entrepreneurship is affirmed.
Obviously, the interest in entrepreneurship varies a lot between the faculties, as is shown in figure 5. For faculties like the faculty ABO and HBS, entrepreneurship is traditionally of great importance. When we look at the more technically oriented faculties like TKT, ROB and CII, interest is average. An other finding was that at faculties where directors and the management see a large turbulence in their fields of expertise with a resulting required attention to entrepreneurship (like in education and health care), students of the belonging faculty do not yet see this attention as important.

These interviews with students, Saxion entrepreneurs, management and employees of all faculties provide the image that entrepreneurship is of great importance at Saxion University now, and this importance will only grow the upcoming years. The previously mentioned attention for entrepreneurship in society, a cause of national competition force, is an important aspect here, just as the turbulence in several fields of expertise.

**Figure 5:**
*Interest in entrepreneurship by faculty (n=12,481)*

These interviews with students, Saxion entrepreneurs, management and employees of all faculties provide the image that entrepreneurship is of great importance at Saxion University now, and this importance will only grow the upcoming years. The previously mentioned attention for entrepreneurship in society, a cause of national competition force, is an important aspect here, just as the turbulence in several fields of expertise.

**Results on Saxion entrepreneurs**
A modest start is made with research concerning the Saxion enterprises.

By now 287 Saxion student enterprises are traced, based on the survey among all students (see figure 6). The number of enterprises belonging to first year students is 57, which is quite high. The other academic years show a pattern, which can be expected: the more progress is made, the more enterprises are raised. A reasonable explanation for this is the increasing attention for the perspective after ending studies. Starting an own enterprise is one of the alternatives then.
Extrapolation of the 287 Saxion enterprises in the responses to our survey produces an estimation of 415 students owning an enterprise in the complete Saxion student population. Those are not distributed evenly over the faculties, as is shown in figure 7. The faculty ABO and HBS were expected to bring about most enterprises. However, the results do not show this. Apparently it is difficult to start a company in the hospitality business, while still studying. To earn extra money as an employee seems to be a more obvious way. Among students of the faculty CII, TKT and LED a reverse result is found: most enterprises are found there, while interest is average.

It is nice to see that also faculties, which traditionally have less to do with entrepreneurship, like AGZ, AMM, APO, still have a few student enterprises. The curious reader will wonder what activity is carried out in these enterprises. In this research, however, only a modest start
is made with the description of all Saxion enterprises, about nature of the activities, dimensions, development and effect on the regional economy. We started to build a research database with Saxion enterprises, both student and alumni enterprises (since 1986). Until now we found the data of 418 Saxion enterprises (300 student and 45 alumni, the rest is unknown). At the next page a few cases of some typical Saxion enterprises can be read.

Based on the first estimate, we expect that, fitting the definition mentioned before (page 4), since the middle 80’s approximately 1000 to 2000 enterprises are raised by students and recent alumni of Saxion Universities, which still exist nowadays. These companies will probably offer work to 10,000 to 20,000 employees, most of them employed in the eastern region. Many of these companies (estimated 80%) are small and probably have a nature like GEP (next page). A limited percentage of these companies will grow to a medium-sized company like Gladior, and only a few will become large. The largest Saxion company that is found in this research is EW, having over 3000 employees, spread in the Netherlands but also international.
EW
EW is a general and technical support service on the domain of guest-concepts for business, health care and hotels. The company is raised in 1991 by Eric Wentink, a former student of Saxion’s Hospitality Business School at Saxion University. EW can call itself the largest general and technical support company, having over 3000 employees and a turnover of more than € 60 million. This market leadership is owed to EW’s unique vision, in which the guest’s perception occupies the central stage in offering service. EW is active in Holland, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland.

GEP Benelux
After finishing Business Administration Studies, Prins and Van Langeveld started a consultancy company called Prins van Langeveld, with help from the TOP-arrangement (a financial fund from the University of Twente). Having the trend of durable entrepreneurship in the back of their mind, they decided to focus on rainwater-systems. The products were imported from the German company GEP. In the year 2000 Prins van Langeveld was taken over and subsidiary company GEP Benelux was raised. GEP is at the moment the only business in this sector in Holland, nevertheless the biggest market is in Belgium, where such systems are obligated for companies. In the year 2007 the company has a complete, broad and high-quality assortment, which can offer any project a suitable water system, for companies as well as individual persons. In this way, utilizing rainwater can be accessible for everyone.

Deltanovum
Deltanovum is a young company, a mechanical engineering student consultancy, raised in 2007 by four students Mechanical Engineering of Saxion University.

The foundation of this company was the interest in entrepreneurship.
The company is now consisting of three students, and offers engineer-services across the total design-process. This varies from carrying out a total project, to problem definition and solution, but also focuses on parts of the process.

Deltanovum has its customers particularly in the region Twente and the Achterhoek. It derives its power from the knowledge and fresh view of the matter, in combination with knowing where to find the right experience. There are close contacts with a machine factory and a well-established engineering office.

Moreover, suitable prices are used, so there is always enough work to do.

Gladior
Gladior is a search engine marketing office that makes sure a website gets and keeps higher positions in search engines.
The company was established in 2000 by Peter Schinkel, former student technical business administration at Saxion University. Nowadays it has 70 employees. Last years hundreds of companies and cooperating partners have taken advantage of Gladior’s unique service.

Gladior has a lot of experience with various search engines and offers its service for several European countries and the international market.

To satisfy customers’ wishes, Gladior is split up in January 2008, forming two new organisations with their own specialty: Gladior BV en Indenty BV. Gladior is taking care of the direct customers and Indenty of the company’s partners. Peter Schinkel is chief of Indenty, for Gladior an external leader is attracted.
Results on entrepreneurship: high ambitions
Entrepreneurship is very important within Saxion Hogeschoelen and is getting even more important next years. The management has the aspiration to double the number of Saxion enterprises the upcoming years. The enormous interest of students in starting an own enterprise shows this aspiration is feasible. As much as 55% of all students indicate they are considering starting an own enterprise. We have to nuance this percentage: it surely indicates that the potential is high, but the respondents giving this answer exists out of different groups varying from ‘yet started’ to ‘maybe’. Especially this last group has a lot of students who ultimately decide not to start an own enterprise.

This percentage of 55% varies over the academies. This is shown in figure 8. Anyhow, even the faculty APO, which is hardly aiming on entrepreneurship, has a percentage of 13% of the students, which are intending to (maybe) start an own enterprise.

Figur 8:
*Percentage of students by faculty, which are (maybe) intending to start an enterprise (n = 12,481).*

Also the move from having the vague feeling of ‘maybe doing something like starting an own enterprise” to making concrete plans is made by as much as 12% of the students, as is shown in figure 9 and 10.
Another research about entrepreneurship and people's intention is carried out by TNS Nipo (2008), by order of ABN AMRO. This recent research, among 1002 (505 men and 497 woman) respondents, showed that one out of three persons between the age of 18 and 55 years old, is dreaming about starting an own enterprise. There is dreamed of more by men (38%) than by woman (32%). The results show that people mainly keep dreaming or thinking. Only 13% of all respondents were actually working out plans in order to realize the entrepreneur dream. The lack of financial resources and the uncertainty that goes together with entrepreneurship, are the most important reasons not to start an own enterprise.

If we compare these figures with the Saxion results, we can see that interest in entrepreneurship at Saxion University is relatively high. This may be due to the fact that Saxion students are young people. The ABN AMRO research showed that, compared to other age groups, especially 18-25 year and 26-35 old people are not to be withheld from their dream to start an own enterprise. While young people (18-25 years old) are willing to take a chance, 26 to 55-years-old are prevented by fear and uncertainty (26 to 35-years-old 23%, 36 to 45-years-old 31%, 46 to 55-years-old 27% respectively). Only 6% of the young people are experiencing this fear.
Results on stimulating entrepreneurship
The following years a well-developed Saxion approach for stimulating entrepreneurship can arise, when proper stimulation takes place. This approach is funnel-shaped, showing the following characteristics (figure 10).

Figure 10:
The Saxion funnel for stimulating entrepreneurship in the year 2012

- Approximately 20.000 students are studying at Saxion University. Our data show that half of these students is interested in entrepreneurship and is intending to start an own enterprise. However, interest is not enough. The ABN AMRO research (TNS NIPO, 2008) showed that fear, uncertainty, risk and a lack of guts form a barrier for starting an own enterprise for 24% of all people dreaming of an own enterprise.

- Saxion has the aspiration to enlarge the interest (ambition development) and to inform students with knowledge involving the consequences of entrepreneurship (organisation development). The management of Saxion University proposes a set of activities, like a small topic in the introduction program of first-year students, a booklet with inspiring examples of successful examples of Saxion enterprises, guest lectures, and offering a couple of minors with entrepreneurship and innovation as a subject. The top ten of stimulating activities are shown in table 1.

- This investigation has shown that there are important differences between all faculties. Therefore, a specific stimulating approach has to be used in every faculty.
Table 1  
Order of ranking stimulating standard items according to board of directors (n=13) (1=high, 10 = low)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average ranking</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. (Small) topic in introduction program of first-year students</td>
<td>1 - 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Minor entrepreneurship</td>
<td>1 - 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Guest lectures by entrepreneurs</td>
<td>1 - 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Optional subject about entrepreneurship</td>
<td>2 - 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Student entrepreneur association YBP</td>
<td>2 - 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Entrepreneur café</td>
<td>2 - 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Saxion price for entrepreneur of the year</td>
<td>2 - 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Seed capital (till 10.000 euro)</td>
<td>1 - 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Venture capital</td>
<td>3 - 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Support introduction on stock market (10 million euro and more)</td>
<td>7 - 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Partly due to these activities, a couple of students will actually start an own enterprise. Research has shown that specific stimulating will cause a increase in the number Saxion enterprises to approximately 1000, or 250 in every academic year. However, as the ABN-AMRO research showed (TNS NIPO, 2008) not everyone is making his or her dream true. A lack of money and resources stops 30% of the dreamers to actualise their entrepreneur dream.

We estimate that 10% of these starters will be in need of externally acquired seed capital. At the moment Saxion University has its own seed capital fund, named SPEED (Saxion Program for Excellent Entrepreneurship Development), which can support these starters.

Most support programs, however, stop at this point of the funnel, which is a missed chance. The support program does on the one hand reflect the ambition of Saxion University, since it gives inspiration to the students. On the other hand, if we stop giving support at the point of offering €10.000- seed capital, mentoring, accommodation and helping to make a business plan, we might not expect to bring in large, growing companies like Gladior and EW. This is the general complaint about stimulating starters in the Eastern Region in Holland (see Enter, 2006).

Additionally it is an tremendous chance for Saxion university to receive the financial benefits of the stimulating policy. Crucell’s stock market flotation in 2006 has returned 21 million to the participating University of Leiden. A similar flotation by a second company is worked on. If Saxion University wants to attract ambitious students, we can better start to be ambitious ourselves. Of course this will take long. It was not until fifteen years that the starter policy offered by the University of Twente had a substantial impact on the employment in Twente region, and even among the starters of this university, no stock quotation has been made. Here we can see a possibility for ambition for Saxion University. But how to realize this potential and ambition?
Ambition driven entrepreneurship

To conclude this article the authors suggest to use a model for the development of a spin off company based on three independent sub processes:

1. Development of formula
2. Development of organization
3. Development of ambition

Like During (1976) most authors on models for innovation and entrepreneurship suggest sub processes are strongly interlinked and interdependent. Our research showed several cases (like EW) of students with ambition to found and build a large million-euro multinational company without the faintest knowledge of the content of the formula. Imagine what type of reaction these young entrepreneurs provoked from their professors! We also found good established Saxion enterprises solely based on the talents of their founder to organize things in an excellent way. No thrilling formula or skyrocketing ambition was found in this companies but simple businesses making stable money. So, contrary to what During proposed, based on our observations we suggest independent or loosely coupled processes. The three sub processes are described here, complemented with the way Saxion University wants to stimulate each sub process.

Sub process 1: Development of formula
For the development of formula a wide variety of literature on strategy is available. But this literature and the models in it hardly help to find a good formula. Most of the spin offs found in the survey have rather shallow formulas. Since the development of the formula is the core of the existence of a company we argue supporting instruments should not intervene too heavily in this sub process but leave content where content must be found: by the entrepreneur.

Sub process 2: Development of organization
Looking at most authors writing on entrepreneurship we see several functions and stages in the development of the new organization. For instant Groen and Van der Sijde (2004) describe entrepreneurship in terms of the entrepreneurial process. They divide the process in three main stages:

1. Recognition of the opportunity
2. Preparing for exploiting the opportunity
3. Exploiting the opportunity

Following this type of reasoning we see a broad variety of skills, competences and traits needed to develop the organization of a Saxion company. Part of the personal traits of the entrepreneur needed in stages 1 (more innovative) and stage 3 (more adaptive) cannot easily be found in one person (Kirton, 1989). The need for development of a team and an organization seems obvious.

When we look at the necessary competences and knowledge domains to develop the organization of a spin off company we found at least the following:

- Knowledge domain of the content of the company
- Marketing and sales
- Economics and law
- Human resources

In Saxion University we cannot find all these competencies together in one faculty so we prepare a design to cross-link the various competencies available in each faculty. Interesting support instruments are cross faculty minors on entrepreneurship and an easily accessible network of experts/professors to help entrepreneurs in their need for specific knowledge. The student entrepreneurs association of Saxion University YBP (over 500 members, www.ybp.nu) with an excellent program of specific lectures and meetings is also part of this cross-linking approach.

**Sub process 3 development of ambition**

The most important sub process however is the development of ambition.

Research by Kirton (1989) showed that the individual human being develops a stable pattern of behaviour between the fourteenth and eighteenth year of life. This pattern, also called personality, is different for every individual, but changes hardly in the course of life of an individual. In other words, our personality develops until the eighteenth year of our life, but is surprisingly stable and unchangeable after that age.

What applies for the individual also seems to apply to companies. The personality, or the soul of a company, is formed in the head of the founder. Not much is found about this creation of an image of a company, as it’s happening in the founder. There is more information available about the stability of this image throughout the year. In this image, also called mental model, we can distinguish three layers:

- The first layer is the defensible competition advantage, the formula which distinguish a company from its competitors, and which is used to win favour from the customers. Part of this formula is the way in which a company is forming the differences between costs and expenses in order to create profit.
- The second layer is called “a connecting thread” by Gerards (1980) and “the golden formula” by Peter Drucker (1954). More recent authors refer to this layer as being “a set of core competences” (Prahalad & Hamel, 1994) and a “business model” (Chesbrough, 2003). It is the way in which a company makes and maintains knowledge to give shape to the competition advantage. This knowledge is elaborated in all processes.
- The last, third layer is the total design of all functions within a company, called “organizational blueprint” by Baron and Hannan (2002).

These three layers are to be considered as the soul of a company.
Rockey (1992) showed that founders of companies have a clear image of all three layers in an early stage. In his research towards five hundred starters of Pepperdine University, Rocky describes the very detailed visions these founders have even before the actual start. Lots of them can even draw their future enterprise down to the smallest detail, including the colour of the interior.

On the contrary, Baron and Hannan (2002), researching two hundred starters of Stanford University, conclude that the last layer of the model, the Organizational Blueprint, is stable and not evolving, and only slightly related to the first two layers. The research by Baron and Hannan showed that roughly 90% of all starters still have the same blueprint after ten years compared to the start.

Other researchers report the same stability at the second layer, the business model. Gerards (1978) report the natural tendency to stay attached to the current business model. Nowadays Chesbrough (2003) finds that companies are not capable of using new business models. In his book Christiansen (1997) shows his amazement about the usual incompetent reaction of settled companies when innovative newcomers are entering their field. The settled companies underestimate the threat of new business models and new technologies badly and are not capable of changing. Also Collins and Porras (1994) detect in their book “Build to Last” that only few companies are capable of changing their mental model during their existence, in order to reach the status of “lasting”.

To put it shortly: settled models about the being of a company are difficult to change, but they do have a large impact on the eventual growth and prosperity of spin-offs. The moment this mental model is created, is in all probability the adolescence period young persons go through. Exactly the period in which adolescents are under the influence of institutes like Saxion University.

So one of the basic rules of supporting instruments should be the nurturing of the real and deep ambition of the young entrepreneur. This may seem in contrast with the more traditional supporting instruments like providing shovel money and helping to make a business plan. Our initial data show that university staff still is in favour of modest so-called “solid and feasible”
type of spin off companies like GEP and the support instruments reflect this vision. To break this paradigm we suggest to leave the more traditional ways of stimulating spin offs and come with more daring designs like breaking traditional role models, creating heroes and myths of Saxion entrepreneurship: an university internal stock market of Saxion companies with a giant display in the entrance hall of the Universities’ main building and support instruments up to entering the public stock markets.

It goes without saying: *When a university wants to attract ambitious young entrepreneurial students it starts with the ambition of the university itself.*
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