

Design project: Haye van der Werf – PTL

I conducted my design project at the Quantitative Management Consulting department of PostNL in The Hague.

For the design project I made a redesign of the model PostNL uses to estimate the cost of mail distribution. The model is used to support tactical and strategical decisions regarding the mail distribution process. It was used to give insight in the financial effects of the decreasing mail volumes on the cost of mail delivery. Different variables could be varied in the model, such as the amount of delivery day and the amount of mailmen, to show their effect in the cost of the different elements of the delivery process.

When I started looking for a design project there were a few things I looked for in the project. I knew that I would like to work on mathematical modelling. I have always enjoyed the courses that centred around building statistical and mathematical models to represent (business) processes. And I wanted to further develop my knowledge on this subject further, and put it in practice. Another important factor was that I wanted to work in a company that is in a dynamical environment and that the work you do is relevant to the company.

I have spoken to several different companies about a potential design project. Because I heard from other students that it is difficult to get your research proposal approved, I asked multiple companies to come up with a detailed project proposal. I discussed these proposals with the coordinator at the RUG to determine whether they were suitable as a design project.

I also made sure that I liked the organizational culture of the company. In the last year of the bachelor and during the master I visited a lot of inhouse days and career days. I never knew what companies I liked, so this helped me a lot. It also helps getting an idea of the possibilities at different companies. I met the recruiter of PostNL during a recruitment dinner, and she was enthusiastic about the possibilities for design project at PostNL. Within a week she arranged an interview with the manager of the department I would end up doing my project. They really made an effort to help me formulate a suiting project proposal, which gave me the idea that this could be the right organization for me.

I made the ultimate decision for PostNL based on the content of the proposal. I had multiple companies I think I would have liked to work, but the project proposal of PostNL fitted the requirements of the Design Project the best.

I have enjoyed my design project at PostNL. During my time there I was really part of the team, I also got a lot of opportunities to get to know the company. The project gave me an idea what it is like to work in a large organization.

I liked to analyse the business context and to translate it into the model, which was the main deliverable for PostNL.

I learned that a thorough problem analysis is vital for a good project, and that you cannot do this on paper. I talked to a lot of people and discussed their perspective on the situation. This not only gives you a better understanding of the project, but also gives the end-result more credibility. I really think knowing and keeping in touch with your stakeholders during the project is the most important part of the design project. I would advise anyone starting a design project to spend enough time on getting to know everybody related to the project. It will show in your end-result. I didn't always feel like it was relevant to take time to speak to some stakeholders, but I wish I spend more time on it at the start of the project.

I also think I could have done a better job at writing my final report of the design project. I didn't really like finalizing the report, when the main deliverable for the company was already finished. I am not really someone that enjoys the final touches of a project, so I struggled with my motivation to finish it a little bit. It is important to not lose focus on this aspect of the project.

To sum up my tips and tricks for finding a design project: Talk to a lot of different people and different companies. Start early visiting inhouse- and career days to get a feel of the things you like in an organization and the things you don't. It will also give you an idea of interesting projects at different companies. Once you have started the project I would advise to take your time to explore the business context and meet your stakeholders and keep in touch during the project. It helps to discuss the progress of your project with them, and you get know the organization a little better. The result will benefit from it, as well as your network at the company.