

Promoting a culture of impact

To further facilitate the recognition and reward of diverse activities and talents, several units and Schools across EUR have implemented a new form of assessing personal development of staff – moving from the Performance & Development cycle to the development cycle. The goal of the development cycle at EUR is to provide an accessible and structural way for managers and employees to focus on the growth, development, well-being, and quality of employees. Paying attention to these elements brings out the best in employees and teams. Connectivity and diversity are encouraged, enabling employees to create a positive impact on the goals to be achieved.

In line with this, ISS aims to promote a culture of impact every step of the way. This starts with hiring staff members who are impact-oriented and giving them the space and freedom to fulfil this focus. This may mean for instance having the opportunity to travel as part of one's research projects. However, this is not enough. If you want to change a culture, you have to start with the leadership. Therefore, ISS strives for impact to be part of everything leadership does, specifically in the 'little' things: from the questions leaders ask during a meeting (e.g. 'who benefits from your research?' and 'how have you worked with your stakeholders?'; instead of 'what journal are you planning to publish in?') to the Dean being part of and actively engaged with the content of as many of the events organised by and at ISS as possible. This way, leadership shows an intrinsic interest in what staff are doing. However, this type of organic leadership focused on impact also brings its own challenges. A persistent question within ISS is 'where are the procedures for this?'

For ISS, these procedures are difficult to describe – much of the value of leadership lay in less-tangible actions. Another challenge for ISS is that people remain worried about the focus on impact in terms of their future careers. Therefore, ISS leadership is encouraged to emphasise several options in 'how to build your profile'. A central question here is: 'How can we allow for different impact identities to flourish without constraining them?'. Proceduralising everything is not the answer. Nonetheless, this narrative-based new approach to the development cycle is a step in the right direction. ■

Creating change through service

'I hope that when I leave, I will be remembered as the man who always talked about servanthood'. This vision drives Wico Verbaan, the Ombuds Officer at EUR, as he works to cultivate a culture of service within the university. Since January 1, 2023, Wico has been dedicated to enhancing the working and learning environment at EUR. His role is to act independently, impartially, and neutrally, ensuring a safe and healthy environment by addressing structural issues and malpractices.

Despite extensive measures for social safety at the university, the system isn't always flawless. 'There are so many possible actors that people sometimes don't know where to turn', Wico explains. One of his primary responsibilities is to assess whether the system functions effectively and, if not, to propose improvements. Therefore, he believes it is essential for the organisation to reflect critically on itself. 'Do we dare to tell ourselves, colleagues, internal or external clients, that we did not do well, that we could have done it differently, and what that might mean for us?'

Wico's dedication to his role is evident in his approach. His philosophy centers on being of service to others, necessitating accessibility and open communication with all members of the EUR community. He stays attuned to the experiences and concerns of students, staff, and faculty to understand and address underlying issues. 'By knowing what is happening within the university, I can best perform my role', he says. This proactive approach helps him identify patterns and systemic issues that may not be immediately visible. To maintain connectivity, Wico regularly meets with key university figures. He holds walk-in sessions for students and organises Ombud lunches for staff, focusing on specific themes to promote transparency and collaboration.

These inclusive and interactive sessions foster open dialogue and idea sharing, enhancing connectivity within the university and fostering stronger networks and relationships.

Maintaining a balance between procedures and humanity

Looking forward, Wico aims to make himself even more accessible. Inspired by the national ombudsman, he plans to introduce an 'ombuds table' on campus, at Erasmus MC and ISS, to further lower the threshold for people to approach him. This initiative will create a welcoming space for direct engagement, enhancing his approachability and providing deeper insights into systemic issues.

Wico's vision extends beyond simply addressing individual complaints. He aims to create a culture where people feel empowered to take initiative and resolve issues at the grassroots level, de-escalating instead of escalating. When talking about an example of one of his cases, he notes:

Everyone was hiding behind a process, whereas two phone calls from me were enough to get people to the table and to get these people to come up with an appropriate solution together. When I asked colleagues concerned afterwards how often this issue happened, they knew exactly how often it happened, but no one took the role to proactively address it. If you filed a complaint about this issue, as EUR we followed the process, so no foot on the ground. But instead, we should be looking at 'how can we solve this?' >>



Wico Verbaan



>> In a rapidly legalising and hierarchical society, maintaining a balance between procedures and humanity is crucial.

Sometimes there are so many procedures in place, but certain cases fall through the cracks. 'Let's address these in a service-oriented manner and take proactive initiatives.' The same with people who are often referred to multiple departments without finding solutions. Wico's approach is to coach and educate individuals to take responsibility and address problems directly, whenever possible. 'We just miss the good conversation sometimes'. Facilitating conversations is a key part of his work, encouraging people to speak to each other, which sometimes even prevents harder consequences or more formalised

pathways. Wico aims to be proactive rather than reactive and wants to coach and empower people to take initiative.

His ultimate vision is for the university to embrace a culture of service. He believes that if everyone were more service-minded, significant positive changes could occur. By encouraging open dialogue and promoting a culture of service, he hopes to create an environment where everyone feels valued and heard, thereby enhancing the university's connectivity and its collective capacity to solve societal problems. He relates his efforts with Desiderius Erasmus' principle that if science is not serviceable to society, it is empty and without value. ■



Establishing the governance for impact

To reinforce EUR's mission to create positive societal impact, the temporary role of Strategic Dean Impact & Engagement has been created. This role was taken up by Prof. Arwin van Buuren on April 1, 2024. In his new role, he will further drive the EUR-wide impact strategy, ensure connection, and report on its progress.

Additionally, we are currently working towards an internally oriented engagement board and an external societal advisory board. To further ensure that impact is embedded within our organisation more sustainably, various Schools have established governance for impact in a way that resonates with their respective cultures and specialities.

By establishing impact governance both at the central and School level, we are working to further embed our impact ambitions in our strategic decision-making, explicitly defining the responsibility for the portfolio on engagement and for the overall impact ambition. Some examples of how this governance has been established School level are highlighted here:

- Establishment of leadership roles to integrate societal impact and engagement
- Professor of Erasmian Values: Facilitating value-driven work ■