

Jonge Honden

(Young Dogs)

2021 – Jonge Honden is a 'junior consultancy' in Utrecht, the Netherlands. It hires young academics for a maximum period of 7 years: the so called 'young dogs'. That is to say: you can be employed for a maximum of 3 years and participate as an entrepreneur for another 4 years. The young dogs work in projects at external organisations that tackle "social" issues. They are deployed at project support, organisation, research and communication, for example. 35 Young dogs are currently employed or work as entrepreneurs at Jonge Honden

The company was founded in 2000. The founders and all other former entrepreneurs, young dogs are "silent partners" and members of the - recently established - Cooperative Association of Watch Dogs.

For this case-description I (FV) studied various previous publications about Jonge Honden (see References) and I spoke with:

Tessa de Leede, the director (during the past three-quarters of a year), she is also an entrepreneur (1.5 years entrepreneur and before that, 2 years in paid employment);

Janna Hollema, (1 year employee);

Luuc Veraart, (2 years employee);

Pieter van Dijk, (1 year freelancer, before 1.5 years employee.

Workplace innovation

Jonge Honden is a private company: 'BV' in Dutch. This company is socially innovative in its work organisation and in labour relations.

The purpose and strategy of the company is twofold. Firstly, the BV wants to offer a springboard on the labor market for enterprising and academically trained starters. And secondly, it aims to contribute to the solution of social issues, with a fresh perspective. Luuc is a young dog who has been employed for two years now. "I was looking for an organisation that radiates social commitment. And I was not sure what I could do well myself. I wanted to develop myself and discover what I like."

Within the BV there are limited partnerships (CVs) of one or two entrepreneurs. The employees are employed by one of the CVs. There are currently five CVs with employees; that's five "teams". In addition, there are two CVs consisting of one entrepreneur or "freelancer". And there is one CV with three entrepreneurs/partners. The CV entrepreneurs are managing partners. One of the CV entrepreneurs functions as director of the BV; that is a formally necessary role. The director carries out formal and administrative work in addition to her advisory work and she regularly consults with the five watchdogs that form the board of the Cooperative Association.

Tessa has recently taken on the role of director. She is an entrepreneur within one of the CVs. She says: "As an entrepreneur I feel just that little bit more responsible compared to when I was employed. As a director, I do not have a special position in decision-making, because we all run the company. I do have the task of guarding the concept of Jonge Honden. In addition, I want to learn more about administration and other matters that are involved in a BV."

Decisions on the general course of events are taken jointly as much as possible.

Every young dog starts as an employee. They are hired on a temporary contract that is renewed three times if necessary. They may remain employed for a maximum of three years. Some young dogs establish a CV before or after that period. Or they take over one within the BV. Others leave the company before the end of the three-year period or when that end comes. Employees start on a slightly lower wage than is earned in comparable positions elsewhere. They have 25 holidays excluding compulsory days off between Christmas and New Year's Eve.

Employees can later compensate overtime with time off, "time for time." Employees do not accrue pension. After six months of service, the first renewal of their contract takes place. They will then have access to a training budget of 1000 Euro per year. In addition, there are internal courses, InterVision and coaching aimed at personal development. Once every six months, a personal development session takes place between the employee and an entrepreneur from his or her team.

As such, a CV entrepreneur can stay with Jonge Honden for a maximum of four years. Then he/she must close the company or sell it to another young dog. The CV entrepreneurs are managing partners. They formally act as employer of the people who are employed by their CV. They earn an income for their employees and for themselves by working externally paid hours. They decide what to invest money in and transfer part of the profit to the BV. This payment is divided between the former entrepreneurs and a charity.

All employees carry out their work independently and in a self-directed manner.

Reason and goals

20 Years ago the founders wanted to create a spatial consultancy for entrepreneurial recent graduates, as they themselves were then. This BV had to offer them the opportunity to develop and build a network. Working for a variety of clients, they could find out where their talents lie and what they would like to use them for the best and with the most pleasure. They focused on assignments from social organisations and assignments that concerned social issues. These are still important goals for Jonge Honden. In terms of content, it was initially about spatial issues, but now it is often also about sustainability, care, participation, communication.

These goals and the orientation towards social relevance naturally led to a socially innovative work organisation. "A flat organisation, no lease cars, no sales department, no secretariat, no decision tree. We do everything ourselves and together, from office management to recruitment and selection".

The BV also wants to play a role in its ecosystem. The new office* is located on the Berlijnplein in Utrecht. With other organisations located on this square, Jonge Honden is working on the creation of a collaborative place, a "culture cluster".

Organisational structure and culture

The BV now consists - as described above - of five CVs or "teams" and three CVs consisting of entrepreneurs only. The teams are composed on the basis of matching or complementary "type of person". The teams do not differ according to subject or market. The freelancers often do focus on a theme or market. The CV, which consists of a collective of three entrepreneurs, calls itself the LAB and focuses in particular on development and innovation.

Once a month, the CV entrepreneurs coordinate the course of events, they consult about the course of Jonge Honden and about hiring new young dogs.

The board of the Cooperative Association of Watch Dogs thinks along and plays a supervisory role. This board regularly consults with the director and checks the annual accounts. Once a year, all former entrepreneurs or "watchdogs" meet.

A typical Jonge Honden culture was created by the self-chosen appearance: young, dynamic, fresh outlook, critical, social and collegial. The temporary stay with Jonge Honden of all employees and entrepreneurs contributes to the desire to learn and develop and to an external orientation. And a third factor is the emphasis on autonomy, self-management and entrepreneurship. This culture is expressed in the hiring of mainly "entrepreneurial types", encouraging taking initiative, room to make mistakes, room for discussion, listening to clients, target groups and colleagues, wanting to learn and dare to do.

Method

You can enter at Jonge Honden by submitting an open application (see forms on the website).

Candidates found suitable are placed in a "fan pool"; that name indicates that today's young dogs are fans of these applicants. The young dogs decide to appoint someone from the fan pool as an employee when a suitable assignment for that person has been found. New colleagues can therefore immediately get started with an assignment and are coached by their teammates. In their first year they receive training from the Jonge Honden Academy. The training courses include the "junior journey" and a training in personal leadership.

All employees do acquisitions, but there are no acquisition targets. A recruited assignment (usually an assignment for one person) is issued via Yammer and the "best match" is sought together. If necessary, the CV entrepreneurs will check in their monthly consultation whether there is a match with one of the candidates in the fan pool. The young dog who has won the assignment is not necessarily the best performer. He or she will maintain contact with the customer about this

assignment. Employees do not use a standard method or working method in the execution of their assignments. Employees are guided and coached during implementation by an entrepreneur from their team. In addition, there is InterVision within the team.

On Fridays, all young dogs do not work on their external assignments, but they spend that day on maintaining contact with each other (at 'het Hok' or online), distributing new assignments and on necessary consultation, administration, internal training, building a network. All opportunities, problems, issues and disagreements are discussed on Friday. In short, Friday is for what is needed for the functioning of the BV, realizing the goals of the BV and the personal goals, building networks, job satisfaction and social cohesion. Employees thus make 80% billable hours. For entrepreneurs, the ratio of billable/non-billable hours is usually 60/40%. They have more administrative and additional acquisition tasks and they guide and coach employees in their team.

Or they spend more time on innovation and development; as in the case of the three entrepreneurs of the CV that is called LAB. After being employed for 1.5 years, Pieter has now been working as a freelancer for 1 year with two others in the CV 't LAB. Why did he take that step - relatively quickly? "I thought: I understand the company. I see opportunities, I know what I want." And: "As a freelancer I can choose to do a paid job for three days and - in addition to the Friday business day - work one day on new products for Young Dogs and for myself."

A possible career within Young Dogs is that of an employee to an entrepreneur. An employee who wants to take this step draws up a business plan. It states what he or she wants to do as an entrepreneur or which service is offered. The plan makes clear what he or she hopes to learn from the company or business. It describes how this plan fits with Jonge Honden. Finally, the aspiring entrepreneur indicates whether he or she wants to take on an employer role or whether he or she chooses the role of freelancer. The initiative-taking young dog seeks support and approval from the CV entrepreneurs within the organisation. With sufficient support, the plan comes into effect and the employee becomes an entrepreneur (for a maximum of 4 years). Janna has been employed as an employee for one year. She says the following about this career perspective. "Many go to another employer after the second year or start as an entrepreneur or freelancer within Jonge Honden. I want to stay longer and also become a team entrepreneur or freelancer within the organisation. I would like to learn everything about entrepreneurship and within 'the safe walls' of Jonge Honden, this is a great opportunity".

The substantive innovation is already ingrained in this method of forming new companies within the BV. In addition, all employees can put forward new ideas; for example an idea for an (internal) development project. You present the idea and ask whoever thinks it should be invested in it. A fund has been created for this (called "Signaling is investing"), in which the entrepreneurs deposit 50 euros per team member per month. The proposals are decided collectively. For example, in corona time, the "Home work toolkit" and the "Online away days" module were developed.

Results

The BV has been operating satisfactorily for twenty years. And the market for "social issues" looks good. Moreover, as an organisation, Jonge Honden is very flexible and innovative and knows how to find creative solutions for "social problems", as recently became apparent during the corona crisis. It has actually never happened that a CV does not run well. This is attributed to the fact that the employees can be widely deployed in all CVs and that colleagues provide good feedback and support.

The employees feel very involved in the organisation. Janna has experienced the following "by running the company together and because of the freedom and autonomy in your work, you automatically become an ambassador." And Tessa also wanted to be director to "monitor the concept of Jonge Honden".

It is great for employees to work at Jonge Honden. They have varied, meaningful and challenging work that appeals to their talents and offers development opportunities. Luuc says that he "started working at Jonge Honden because of the social commitment he feels and which he can put into practice in this organisation".

Pieter says: "Are you curious about how things work at many different organisations/clients, then you can experience that at Jonge Honden."

In so far as there were employees who - despite training and coaching - did not fit or function properly, a self-evident solution has usually presented itself. They left for an organisation that suited them better, to the satisfaction of both parties.

Although employees do not have an indefinite contract, they regard this temporary period as a stepping stone to discover where their talents and interests lie. Janna says: "through the work and the people at Jonge Honden, I found out what I really like." And Pieter has experienced: "You can ask anything here, you can kick shins and there are nice people with a social drive. Time enough to specialize later."

You can start a career at Jonge Honden right away, despite the temporary relationship with the company. That is thanks to training, a training budget, coaching, InterVision and feedback and that can be done by making a step to freelancer or entrepreneur of a CV.

Referenties

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* The old office burned down in 2020. Jonge Honden currently works temporarily from a site hut. A new office is being built on the Berlijnplein.

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