



New Models of Collaboration *A Guide for Managers*

The Hotjob.be Project

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Introduction

This report describes the case of Hotjob.be, a portal developed by FOREM, a public employment and training service in the Walloon region of Belgium. It begins by describing how the project emerged in its European and national setting, as well as the internal factors that called into question FOREM's strategy. Next we briefly review various points related to project management (description of services, internal and external promotion, the staff's position internally, etc.). Lastly, we discuss cooperation with both private and public partners.

Background

From ONEM to FOREM

Upon leaving school, unemployment registration is an administrative procedure that every student must undertake. Registration enables them to preserve their right to social security, while remaining temporarily covered by their parents' mutual. Unemployment registration also has other advantages such as the possibility of landing a subsidized job, which for the employer means reduced social contributions or else premiums for hiring.

Up until 1989, unemployment registration had to be done at the ONEM (National Employment Office). Yet passage of the Special Act of August 8, 1980 on institutional reform led to a division of powers at the regional, community and national level. This division took effect in 1989. ONEM retains jurisdiction over managing unemployment insurance while functions delegated to the regions (placement of job-seekers) or communities (occupational training of job-seekers and workers) became the responsibility of newly created organizations:

	Employment	Training
Walloon region	FOREM	FOREM
Flemish region	VDAB ¹	VDAB
German-speaking community	ADG ²	ADG
Brussels capital region (French-speaking)	ORBEM ³	Brussels Formation
Brussels capital region (Dutch-speaking)	BGDA ⁴	VDAB

¹ Vlaams Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding [*Flemish Employment and Office Service*]

² Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft [*German-speaking Community Employment Office*]

³ Office Régional Bruxellois de l'Emploi [*Brussels Regional Employment Office*]

⁴ BrusselsenGewestelijke Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling [*Brussels Employment Office*]

FOREM's Mission

FOREM has a twofold mission:

- An employment and training service for individuals (the organization undertakes to help the job-seeker find and land work as well as provide training based on their profile and aspirations);
- A recruitment and employee training service for employers.

Managing job offers is therefore a core mission of this public service. To cite a few statistics⁵, in 2000, FOREM recorded 234,568 job-seekers, who can be categorized as follows by sex and age group:

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
Under 25	27,010	30,927	57,937
25 – 40	44,168	65,656	109,824
40 – 50	24,488	28,876	53,364
50 or over	7,259	6,184	13,443
Total	102,925	131,643	234,568

That same year, FOREM managed 53,000 job offers distributed through various channels such as postings at FOREM centres and partners, the “jobline”, Internet, television, the print media and radio (with an 80.5% satisfaction rate). FOREM also dispensed (directly or through partnerships) a total of 18,000 training courses, which represents 6,548,527 hours of training.

Status

FOREM was created by a Walloon Regional Council decree on December 16, 1988 which gave it the status of a Class B regional public-interest organization. FOREM enjoys self-management, which in its case is handled by a management committee.

FOREM has 150 offices throughout Wallonia, a budget of 10 billion Belgian francs and 3,200 agents, making it the largest Walloon pararegional organization.

Following the June 1999 legislative elections, the new Walloon government launched a program called “A Contract for Wallonia’s Future.” In it, political authorities confirmed their intention of modernizing and improving the performance of public services.

On April 17, 2001, Marie Arena, Walloon Minister of Employment and Training, signed the new 2001-05 management contract that called for FOREM to reorganize by clearly separating activities that by nature would continue to depend on the public service from those that henceforth would be open to competition. The new FOREM was organized into three divisions, each with its own function:

⁵ Figures taken from 2000 statistical report.

- A director-coordinator function that mainly involved implementing the employment policies emanating from the government. This is the level that handles the tasks of coordinating agents, information, and user and employer orientation;
- A public training provider function that offered free services for job-seekers, workers and firms active in occupational training;
- A public corporation to manage revenue-generating activities of a commercial nature such as a temporary placement or personnel selection.

The new organization therefore had to adapt its tools to the new demands of competition, while continuing to provide a public service.

Funding

FOREM's main sources of funds are:

- Grant under Walloon Region budget: 76.55%
- European Social Fund: 0.84%
- Miscellaneous revenue, mainly the sale of goods or services related to FOREM's activities and financial products: 1.89%
- Receipts of non-training agencies: 0.81%
- Reserve account: 15.28%
- Other: 4.63%

Environment

Belgian and International Setting

It is absolutely essential to describe briefly the Belgian and European employment situation that undeniably influenced FOREM's strategic choices.

At the European level, most noteworthy was the 1996 adoption of International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 181, which recommended opening up the job market and creating a market in which public employment services and private agencies could freely compete. Belgium is still in the process of ratifying the Convention.

The competition therefore comes mostly from abroad, but also increasingly at the regional level. Belgium already has a multitude of private temporary work, placement and training agencies that compete with FOREM.

Internal Catalytic Factors

The 1996-99 management contract required FOREM to achieve ambitious concrete results. In 1997 FOREM did a self-evaluation with the help of two studies conducted among clients by

outside agencies. The first examined the satisfaction of external clients and the second FOREM's image. Both took the form of surveys. The results are not outstanding and point to a number of shortcomings.

Level of Satisfaction – 1997

Satisfaction rates		1997
Individuals	Job-seekers	51%
	Unemployment workers	60%
	Reabsorption Plan Training interns	66%
Employers	Temporary personnel hirers	71%
	Employment services clients	55%
	URP worker hirers	65%

The main criticisms levelled at FOREM can be summed up as follows:

- FOREM doesn't provide customized service. Clients want their needs handled personally by a single representative offering a service package adapted to their situation;
- According to employers, there is little balance between labour supply and demand;
- FOREM pays little attention to the service sector.

Image Study – 1997

FOREM's spontaneous image	Individuals	Employers
Positive associations	54%	54%
Neutral associations	20%	22%
Negative associations	26%	24%

FOREM's name was recognized by just about everyone, but most viewed FOREM employees as "bureaucrats" or "paper-pushers". Many respondents still had a strong tendency to confuse FOREM and ONEM activities. The weaknesses uncovered by the survey were a lack of flexibility and communication.

The audit, however, was not all gloomy and revealed the human potential and vitality found within the organization.

A combination of factors related to opening up the employment market and the mixed results of internal surveys led FOREM to adapt its development strategy and opt for a new organizational model.

As we have seen, the ILO Convention in the process of ratification along with the results of the external audit and objectives of the 1996-99 management contract forced FOREM to adopt a new method of operation with a predominantly extroverted orientation. In its new action plan,

the client (individual or employer) would henceforth be at the centre of the organization's concerns. Yet since FOREM would primarily remain a public service, it still had to attach a great deal of importance to equal opportunity and universal access to its services.

Around the same time, the one-stop concept was emerging in Belgium. The idea was therefore naturally worth exploring if this type of solution could be seen as an electronic point of contact with citizens, and it was in this particular context that the Hotjob project gradually took shape.

Hotjob.be: The Project

Portal Services

The services available at the Hotjob.be portal are divided into two main groups based on the type of external user: access for individuals and access for employers.

The following table summarizes the different products for each type of user.

Hotjob Products	
Product	Description
Services for Individuals	
Jobs: help-wanted listings	Search by criteria and tree. Users can save their search as well as opt to receive results by email. Registration is mandatory for using this service.
Jobspot: employers recruiting	Job offers can also be viewed by employer or based on the user's profile. Applications can be sent directly to the potential employer. Registration is mandatory for using this service.
CV en ligne: on-line CV postings	The Hotjob site has a standard on-line CV posting setup. Users can contact client service (the back office) for help. CVs remain active at the site for three months, and can be regularly updated and reposted. CV hit statistics can also be viewed.
Inscription en ligne: on-line registration with FOREM	Gives new users access to the various services.
Mode d'emploi: how-to and employment information	This is primarily an information service. It tries to answer frequently asked questions such as how to choose a career, the best way to look for a job, what about labour laws etc. Site registration is not required for access to this service.
Se former: training opportunities	This area has a wealth of information about training opportunities in Belgium and abroad. Users can find out about existing skills centres and internship

Hotjob Products	
Product	Description
Espace jeunes: sources for young people	<p>formulas. The service also includes a set of links to training-related sites in Belgium and elsewhere.</p> <p>The youth area is intended to address the specific needs of young people. It explains options upon leaving school, how to handle first job interviews, how to write a first CV, etc.</p>
Services for Employers	
Jobs: help-wanted listings	The more or less customized listing created by the employer is posted at the site within 48 hours. Hit statistics for the listing concerned can also be viewed. Employer registration with Hotjob is mandatory for using this service.
Jobspot: customized job offers	Employers have the option of customizing their job offers to make them more attractive and visible at the site by including, for example, images. A fee is charged for this service.
Focus: hiring pool management	This service enables employers to create up to three candidate pools for profiles they regularly hire. There is also a fee for this service.
CV en ligne: on-line CV listings	This service enables employers to consult the database of job-seekers. Employers can do a search based on various criteria. Although the service is free, site registration is mandatory for using it.
Espace entreprises: sources of practical information	This area has a bundle of useful information. The main topics are occupations (dictionary of trades and professions for writing job offers), employment contracts, social security, useful tips for new business launchers.
Formation: employee training	This service provides training information for employers. It also describes the various subsidies available to employers for employee training, and includes a set of links to sites related to both employer and employee training.
Services for All	
My Hotjob	This new service enables users to access customized information at a single location. After logging in, users can check the CVs or job offers that match their criteria. Among other benefits, they also receive articles

Hotjob Products	
Product	Description
	and information based on the preferences they indicate.
Kiosks	Kiosks is an area open to everyone. It has a discussion forum and FAQ for both employers and individuals.
Scoop	Scoop is the portal's weekly e-zine, featuring topical articles about employment and training. It also includes links to other related or interested sites as well as suggestions for further reading.

Project Management

A Heterogeneous Team

The members of the team recruited to participate in the Hotjob project had a wide variety of professional backgrounds.

The project manager had a Bachelor degree in Archeology and Doctorate in Philosophy and Letters. He had spent some time on technological issues related to underwater topography and developing multimedia teaching material for universities, and ended up specializing in man/machine relations.

The team recruited for the core project consisted partly of university researchers and technicians or else young graduates, all with a variety of potential for approaching employment issues in a different way, particularly from an anthropological angle.

The initial idea was really to favour versatility in individual profiles in order to create an arena of information corresponding to user needs. For example, there were linguists, educators, sociologists, psychologists, technical experts, and even specialists in ergonomics. This highly heterogeneous team was formed, not in pursuit of technology for technology's sake, but more fundamentally to meet a need by means of a portal.

The Project's Position Internally

Deliberations on the added value of new technologies and the effort to design a one-stop centre began early in 1997. Management and project design choices focused on creating a new entity entirely dedicated to this task: new personnel management procedures, new recruitment methods, new managerial style. The concept study ended up landing a large three-year budget. In October 1997, the CIS (Client Information System) team already consisted of some 15 people with a broad range of profiles.

Until Hotjob was launched in 1999, the organization chose to develop its applications in an extremely autonomous manner behind closed doors. Contact with FOREM's internal agents was scarce and difficult.

This choice is first and foremost explained by the imperatives associated with the relatively tight planning for the project. The red tape of the public administration was terrifying, and the possibility of in-house development of the portal had quickly been discarded. The core of the application would therefore be developed in a vacuum by a specially recruited team, and subsequently imposed on all FOREM agents.

The organization was nonetheless aware of the dangers of this type of approach and the serious risk of seeing the solution rejected soon after its launch.

Although the project had clearly been a FOREM initiative, the team did everything in its power to dissociate itself with FOREM, starting with its choice of name for the portal: hotjob.be instead of forem.be. The results of the survey on FOREM's image were certainly factored into this decision. The strategy was give the project as much of an edge as possible by shying away from association with the slightly negative image projected by the public institution before the portal really had a chance to prove itself.

Service Selection Strategy

The selection of services offered to outside users was based on various factors and/or techniques. First comes the set of services largely dependent on endogenous factors related to FOREM's activities and two basic missions, namely:

- To help individuals with finding jobs and training, and helping employers recruit and train personnel;
- The services typically targeted were job offers, on-line CVs, training assistance, etc.

The second method used to identify the needs of potential system users consisted of a three-phase market study done from a marketing angle:

- Focus groups;
- Guide and script development based on the survey results;
- For each identified target group (SMB, major corporation, young job-seeker, chronically unemployed etc.), the view of the segment was refined by using a qualitative analysis of each group so as to adapt to each public based on its profile.

Client identification, required for access to the on-line products, provided Hotjob team members with a good deal of information about user and consumer habits. This data made it entirely possible to do a behavioural study to gain a real understanding of who the clients were and what they wanted, so as to provide them with the information they sought in the desired form. The new product, *My Hotjob*, was the outcome of this type of approach.

Development Strategies

The organization favoured a marketing approach to the problem of on-line positioning in order to regularly offer clients new services. New products appear at the site about every six months. The idea is to foster interaction with users, get them interested and motivate them to come back by constantly titillating their curiosity. This approach was selected over the development of a static final solution imposed once and for all.

The Hotjob.be portal was launched in November 1999 and has since then been subject to continuous changes and improvements. At present there is no end date in sight for the project.

Promotion and Training

External

At first, the advertising and marketing intended to promote the project among external users was not very heavy. Once or twice a year, a major promotional campaign was organized for specialty magazines, the radio or fairs. This marketing weakness was a deliberate choice from the start. All campaigns demand time, energy and money. The strategy of the DIS (CIS at the time) was to focus almost exclusively on developing the portal services, thereby retaining the possibility of ultimately rethinking the marketing if the project was a sure hit. Today launch of the new *My Hotjob* product is making a bigger splash. It should also be noted that FOREM's strength also lies in its network of 3,000 agents scattered throughout Wallonia. This means of disseminating information on a wide scale is an undeniable advantage. Conversely, if misused, this asset could just as easily be turned against the project.

Unfortunately, this is what initially happened when Hotjob was launched in 1999. FOREM agents, in steady contact with job-seekers and employers, continued going about their jobs without promoting the new portal externally. A number of factors may account for this. For one, portal development was screened from most FOREM agents — unfolding behind closed doors, as mentioned earlier. This made it very difficult for the agents to become involved later on and take over the task of promoting a tool with which they were not very familiar. Even though they could still learn, the sense of exclusion and non-involvement is certainly not to be overlooked. The reluctance of the business counsellors to talk about the products available at Hotjob also undoubtedly stems from some services no longer being free. This gave the agents' jobs a much more commercial orientation — a novelty they had a hard time adjusting to.

Internal

As we have just briefly explained, acceptance of the portal internally was slow and difficult. The Hotjob team had spent three years working independently and very rarely involving FOREM's internal departments which eventually would be required to use the new tool. When Hotjob was launched, the internal agents took a great deal of time to become familiar with and master the new portal. They did not promote it externally.

To solve this problem, as well as train FOREM agents and get them more involved, the Hotjob team created a webcoaching network, which undoubtedly represents an original initiative.

Webcoaching, a continuous nearby and remote training system, was introduced at FOREM so that agents could become familiar with the services available on-line for external clients, i.e. individuals and employers. The webcoaches, all volunteers, constituted an internal network at FOREM. Their job was to help disseminate information and the new work methods associated with the new information and communication technologies, both within the institution and with the public. The webcoaches and their 200 relays enabled the 3,000 FOREM agents to become familiar with, understand and participate in management of the on-line products developed by the CIS.⁶

Collaboration

Given the diversity of skills required by the project as well as the range of objectives, it was essential to team up with a number of partners and work together on developing the portal. It is, in fact, quite rare to find people with both technical and methodological skills, knowledge of the employment, training and business world (with an e-commerce approach) as well as familiarity with how different markets work, relations between supply and demand and, lastly, teaching and organizational skills all on the same team.

The partnerships briefly described in this section fall into different categories. Some could be considered financial, others interdepartmental and lastly, still others purely business partnerships.

At what point can one really talk about a partnership? Apart from the financial aspect, isn't it also possible to adopt a "partnership attitude"? That is what the Hotjob team aimed for.

For the sake of efficiency, initially the partnership was deliberately rather limited. Today it is in the process of evolving and diversifying to enhance the portal.

Performance

Collaboration

Generally speaking, the cooperation among the various partners working on the project went smoothly. Team members visibly deliberated considerably about the very concept of partnership and, according to them, some of the criteria guarantee the success of cooperation.

- Clear agreements on the project were of prime importance. The legal aspect is in fact very sophisticated from every standpoint. It was essential to define the roles and obligations of

⁶ Description from an internal evaluation report on the webcoaching system.

each party as clearly as possible, especially since it was a cost/benefit-sharing type partnership. Writing contracts must not be left solely to the discretion of lawyers and computer scientists. It is vital for cooperation between the two interests.

- It is also worth knowing your potential partner and phasing in cooperation, on the terms of the organization carrying the project. It is sometimes preferable to create a partnership step-by-step. Since trust develops gradually, it is easier to go from a client-supplier relationship to more extensive cooperation later.
- Patience with certain problems is also very important, and especially with this type of project whose technological dimensions are not always fully mastered because they are constantly changing.

The lack of long-term vision on the part of a few partners, which is essential for going beyond simple client-supplier type cooperation, was described as an obstacle to the development of healthy cooperation.

Partners	Type of Partnership
The first partnership was with the different FOREM departments (between the DIS, employment and training) as well as between headquarters and the regional branches.	Natural
Even though this is obviously a natural partnership, it was not easy for Hotjob team members to establish relations because for a long time they were viewed as pure “techies” with insufficient understanding of FOREM’s business dimension.	
Fundamental partnership with senior management. The strategic will underlying the project was very clear and highly promising.	Natural
The lead technical partner, Software AG, is responsible for portal development. This is a client-supplier type partnership resulting from a competition. A relationship of trust has developed over the years and the consultants work at the project site, where they are involved in technical decisions and input some of their know-how.	Private/public Advisory
The WIN is a natural partner (master contract) that supplies the telecommunications infrastructure.	Natural
The cooperation with ANPE ⁷ is closer to the idea one might have of a partnership. They provided all the facilities for basing the Hotjob system on their directory of occupations. The legal agreement took months before being finalized.	FOREM’s longstanding natural partner. Strategic alliance
The financial partnership with the Walloon region, in addition to FOREM grant, was made possible through the CIS project. A DG5 site also provided a contribution.	Financial

⁷ Agence nationale pour l’Emploi (French-speaking public service) [*National Employment Agency*]

Partners	Type of Partnership
<p>The partnership with APEC⁸ is much less formal and important. In Belgium, the concept of manager only exists unofficially. This made it interesting to see how they would solve this problem with APEC. Here it is more a matter of exchanging information. Visibility is provided, but it doesn't yet go much farther than that. In this case, it is more a matter of maintaining good contacts in the event of a more official partnership in the future.</p>	<p>APEC was already known by FOREM. There had been partnerships in the past.</p>
<p>With Appel, it was mainly a business partnership to furnish Imac's Employment Resource Areas. This was followed by joint marketing efforts, co-branding and marketing space swaps. Since these initial experiences were positive, Hotjob eventually wanted to extend the cooperation to the realm of e-learning. In terms of service, it didn't work. Appel lacked the sufficient capital in terms of time and human resources to invest in the project.</p>	<p>Business partnership.</p>
<p>Hotjob used L'ECHO magazine to supply articles for its Scoop e-zine. Editorial costs would have been too high had it been produced internally. The agreement was reached in the wake of predominantly financial differences.</p>	<p>Business partnership</p>

All these agreements were settled by the legal department responsible for examining the case.

Project

This case study clearly reveals that, from the outset, the Hotjob project was an external one intended primarily for external users. It was screened from FOREM's internal agents during the development phase. This gave rise to a few problems, especially when the portal was launched. In fact, the agents did not incorporate the new on-line products into their daily tasks, or did so very little.

This situation, however, was clearly understood by the organization and we are now seeing a shift in priorities with increasing consideration given to the internal services involved. Noteworthy, for example, is the development of an interface specifically intended for FOREM agents.

Services

- Usage rate climbing;
- General satisfaction hard to assess at this early stage of the project.

⁸ Agence pour l'emploi des cadres [*Management Employment Agency*]