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STUDENTS' CONSULTANCY. AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

A GUIDEBOOK

for operating, implementing and
managing students' consultancy live
projects

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Summary

Introduction.....	7
Part One Exploring Live projects.....	9
1. A new pedagogy	9
2. What is a “live project”?	10
2.1. What is a live project?	12
2.2. Why do we need live projects?.....	13
2.3.Live projects within higher education.	16
2.4.Live projects and experiential learning.....	17
3. Experiential Learning	20
3.1. Constructivism and learning.....	20
3.2. Transformative learning	21
3.3. Active learning	21
3.4. Experiential learning in practice	23
3.5.Experiential learning and work placement	25
3.6. Experiential learning methodologies	26
3.7. Learning styles	30
3.8 Implication for educational institutions	32
CASE STUDIES – TESTING THE WATERS. TOWARDS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND LIVE PROJECTS	34
CASE STUDY 1. LOOKING FOR A BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE, Simulated guided tours in the “Tourism Guide” course (Bachelor’s Degree in Tourism, UAB).....	34
CASE STUDY 2. REFLECTING ON INTERNSHIP AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING.....	37
The internships in two postgraduates of the School of Tourism and Hotel Management of the UAB.	37

CASE STUDY 3 USING PROBLEM BASED LEARNING	39
Project Work of the Management of Trade and Service module.....	39
References	42
Part Two Managing Live projects.....	49
1.The Commissioner	49
1.1.Involving the commissioner and creating a network	50
1.2. Typologies of commissioners	53
1.3. Choosing the commissioner and the brief	57
1.4. Controlling the scope and tuning the brief	59
1.5. What can a class or a students' team achieve?	61
1.6. The commissioner as a lecturer	63
1.7. The commissioner as a team member and a team leader	65
1.8. Working with the commissioner	66
1.9. The commissioner assessment	69
2.The students.....	69
2.1. 360° learning.....	70
2.2. The power of emotions.....	71
2.3.Overcoming failure and fear	72
2.4. Managing chaos and creation	74
2.5. Live projects with multidisciplinary classes	75
2.6. Live projects at different university levels	76
3.The Lecturer	78
3.1. Qualities	78
3.2. Role.....	79
3.3. The challenge of low control.....	80
3.4. Stages of learning and the lecturer role	81

3.5. Ground rules.....	83
3.6. Creating the teams.....	83
3.7. The lecturer as a team member.....	84
3.8. Managing emotions.....	84
3.10 Giving feedback and guiding reflection: the key activity.....	85
3.11. Motivating the students.....	86
3.12 Time management.....	87
CASE STUDIES: INVOLVING THE STUDENTS, FINDING AND MANAGING THE COMMISSIONER.....	89
CASE STUDY 1. FIRST STEPS IN INVOLVING THE STUDENTS AND THE COMMISSIONER.....	89
<i>Research about cultural tourism in Catalonia</i>	89
CASE STUDY 2. INVOLVING THE COMMISSIONER THROUGH THE STUDENTS.....	92
<i>You Mi DMC</i> Final Degree Project.....	92
CASE STUDY 3. <i>Bookinguass: A technical brief?</i>	96
CASE STUDY 4. <i>The team leader commissioner</i>	99
References.....	102
Part Three Introducing live projects within university study programmes.....	104
1. Introducing live projects within university study programmes.....	104
1.1. Live projects within university study programmes: the possible typologies.....	104
1.2. Relationship with other programme contents.....	107
1.3. Involving your colleagues.....	109
1.4. Institutional barriers.....	110
1.5. Barriers related to the formal knowledge mindset.....	113
2. Live projects as a unit/module.....	114
2.1. Setting the learning goals.....	115
2.2. Content.....	115
2.3. Setting the calendar.....	120

2.4. Outputs: reports, presentations	122
2.5. Outputs: the diary	123
2.6. Assessing knowledge and technical skills.....	126
2.7. Assessing soft skills.....	127
2.7. Tutorial continuous assessment	128
CASE STUDIES: INTRODUCING AND ADAPTING LIVE PROJECTS	130
Case Study 1. STRATEGIC BRANDING: A MODULE INTEGRATING A LIVE PROJECT APPROACH	130
CASE STUDY 2. ADAPTING THE LIVE PROJECT APPROACH.....	132
A simulated commercial management case	132
Case Study 3. INTRODUCING LIVE PROJECTS: A CHANGE OF STATUS FOR THE ACADEMICS.....	136
International Transfer of Student Consultancy in Kenya	136
References	139
APPENDICES.....	142
1.Hints & tips.	142
2.Sample of reflective diary entries – 1.	143
3.Example of a Unit Handbook – 2018	0

Introduction

This guidebook is intended for all the lecturers and Higher Education Institutions willing to change all or part for their teaching approach in order to achieve improved results both for the quality of learning, and the employability of their students.

The book is one of the outputs of the Erasmus+ project ELPE - Experiential Live Projects Enhancement, and it is born out of the authors experience and awareness that many lecturers and teachers in Europe are attempting to improve the quality of their teaching, to link more and more with the industry and the labour market needs. However, they have been faced with implementing these changes by themselves, without a reference, or indeed an up to date guidebook.

In fact, the authors of this handbook themselves bring together similar experiences developed independently in different parts of Europe about an innovative teaching approach – live projects within the role of Students' Consultancy. They are based upon experiential learning whereby students engage in management consultancy roles in some form of live research enquiry assigned by an external business client.

Live projects are attracting more and more interest in the recent years, because of their ability to enhance the learning experience and quality and to develop sets of transferrable and cognitive skills that are the most required by today's employers. However, the lack of a guide on how to implement it, adapt it, what are the basic features and requirements, etc. leaves everyone to develop live projects from scratch, without the

possibility to build on other HEIs experiences. This also entails the risk that live projects implemented in this uniformed way are not achieving their full potential, and could be dismissed easily.

With this in mind, this new guidebook brings together the experience and the reflections of institutions and lecturers who have been managing live projects for more than 10 years, and adds the fresh experience of HEIs that, within the ELPE project itself - are presently trying to integrate live projects in their programmes.

The reflections on the features of live projects as the more experienced partners included in the ELPE projects understand them would have been more difficult without the questions and observation of the less experienced institutions and their lecturers.

The guidebook is divided into three parts, all completed by some case studies, derived from firsthand experience, mainly – but not only – of the teachers who have recently started to reflect upon and attempting to implement live projects. Not all the cases are meant to be positive examples: sometimes they exemplify a path or reflection, sometimes they underline risks to be controlled. In any case, they are surely situations where any lecturer can easily picture themselves.

The first one clarifies what is (and what is not) a live project within the role of Students' Consultancy and identifies the basic features a live project should have, and then deepens the characteristics and requirements of experiential learning. Understanding experiential learning is in fact essential for live projects. Without it, as stated in the first chapters of this

guidebook, we only have a consultancy activity proposed to the students would be undertaken without any guarantee on the quality or enhancement of learning. Therefore, this specific part of the guidebook provides all the fundamentals to implement and manage experiential learning experiences.

This part is completed by some case studies that document the first steps into investigating and becoming curious for something different than traditional teaching and lecturing, and trying to better understand the relationship between academic learning and internships, and ultimately what experiential learning means.

The second part is dedicated to the management of live projects. One of the other features explored is in acknowledging how complex experiential learning methods are for beginners. The guidebook highlights the following: How to involve the commissioners? What should be their role? What is their relationship with the lecturer? Will the students be happy to be consultants within their preferred industry? Are they really able to achieve a brief in a professional way? How can we manage failure? What is the lecturer's role in this kind of learning environment? What should he/she provide to the students? Part II wants to answer all these questions and more, and it includes some case studies which exemplifies the difficulties but also the opportunities and satisfactions of involving commissioners and students in this kind of experience.

Finally, the third part provides all the information, tools, tips, key attention points to integrate live projects within an academic unit, a programme, or introducing a Students' Consultancy unit on its own. It includes some advice on what to expect at an institutional level, and how to try to overcome the possible difficulties including, how to involve other colleagues, but also how to prepare the syllabus, organise the calendar, define the assignments, assess and mark the students' work and achievements. This part includes not only examples of the implementation of live projects within the role of Students' Consultancy in different universities and countries, but also an appendix full of hints and tips and ready to use materials.

Literature on experiential learning is growing, but there is a lack of empirical research regarding live projects. Hereby, lies the problem in implementing this approach. Hence, the examples, advice experience and tools derived partially from other sources, but mainly directly from the authors' experiences, and the similarities they found among them. Hence, providing a hand on approach on developing Students' Consultancy.

The partnership of the ELPE project and the authors really hope that the guidebook provides and delivers a useful tool box for all the lecturers and institutions willing to enhance the quality of learning of their courses, looking for stronger cooperation with the industry, improving the employability and skills of their students.

Part One

Exploring Live projects

1. A new pedagogy

The role of higher educational institutions (HEI) in societies has been consistently debated in the recent years. Should they produce scientists and critical thinkers with tax-payers money or obedient experts to satisfy employers' needs for higher profits? Whilst this argument might appear to be a little exaggerated, the question behind it is - what kind of competences students should reach during their university studies. The traditional argument is that university education should be free of the business world ties and problems and focus on more general aims, but one of the questions highlighted here is the employability of graduates. According to Pyykkö (2014) the employability of university graduates is becoming more topical with the Bologna process as well as Lifelong Learning. To what extent do the traditional universities supply the students with contemporary competences needed in the fast-changing work/life balance? At the same time, the traditional universities have their independence that allows them to work as they prefer or find best.

The universities born as colleges or vocational institutions have a more pragmatic approach to their independence

and work/life connections. Their aim is more often to give their graduates those competences that are needed in the work life balance. The HEI scene is unstable and in the fierce competition of talents, universities must make compromises to please both the academic world and employability. To make compromises e.g., through emphasising work life competences, changes not only the focus on the content of the studies, but also on the pedagogy or the way in which studies are executed. Today's work life competences are more general, and meta or soft competences that can't be reached through traditional frontal teaching and lecturing with pre-determined results. New methods of teaching and studying must be introduced. Or should we even talk anymore about teaching and studying? Should the focus be on learning? According to Isacsson (2013) "This change in pedagogy and pedagogical approaches at institutions of higher education takes place in order not to produce knowledge, skills, and competences that cannot be used in the working life."

What is pedagogy? It is in the centre of the modern education and institutional schooling together with curriculum. Pedagogy can be defined as the science of education or methodical and instructive strategies of teaching (Chen, 2015). A typical and traditional model of classroom education dating back to the Middle Ages has been successful until the industrial era, but knowledge society demands new ways of thinking when it comes to teaching and learning. The perceptions of "knowledge",

“man” and “learning” are also changing and the knowledge itself is no longer so important: the focus is on what one can do with it (Ritalahti, 2015). But is pedagogy about teaching? Mark K. Smith (2012) argues that a new way of understanding pedagogy is focusing on the process of accompanying learners.

Is pedagogy as a concept correct or suitable for HEIs? Lindblom-Ylänne and Nevgi (2002) state that originally pedagogy means bringing up and guiding children and young people. The students at universities are adults, though not always grownups. Instead of HEI pedagogy, it would be possible to use HEI andragogy concept that originates from Greek words *man* and *guiding*. Andragogy can be interpreted as student-centric and problem-oriented techniques with an aim to support adults’ self-steered learning. After the brief description of andragogy, it would be easy to link it to experiential learning. Another concept from Ancient Greece that could be used in HEI pedagogy framework is “*paideia*”. *Paideia* can be interpreted as training of a man to reach his full potential and to become an ideal member of the society. However, differences in learning between adults, children and young people are not wide since people learn in diverse ways, in spite of their age.

Pedagogical activities in HEIs signify e.g., curriculum work and development of teaching, planning and implementation of teaching, supervising, academic advising and supportive services around them (Korhonen, 2007). Future challenges

in HEI pedagogy are focused on solutions that enhance learning of competences that are needed in life and work life, thus familiar activities can change in the process. E.g., there is perhaps no any further need of traditional class room teaching or lecturing as the only implementation of a course. This shift also means a change in the traditional teaching culture and the role of teachers (Kolkka & Karvinen, 2012).

The chosen pedagogy or pedagogical strategy steers the everyday activities also in HEIs. It is most visible in the implementation descriptions and practical implementations of the curriculum and modules and courses as parts of it. The practical questions concerning pedagogy are the following: pedagogical choices in competence-based learning, the visibility of the learning process, how different environments enable learning, how individuality and sense of community are expressed in curriculum, etc. (Kullaslahti, Nisula & Mäntylä, 2014). Experiential learning as a pedagogical approach is wide and flexible but needs a definition that can be shared by all the participants. An example of this is the inquiry-based learning and its implementation at Haaga-Helia’s Porvoo campus as a shared understanding of an approach and a box of tools to enhance and guarantee learning through industry commissioned projects (Ritalahti, 2015).

Chen (2015) asks if there is any education, teaching or instruction without pedagogy.

2. What is a “live project”?

Live projects within the role of Students' Consultancy have gained some attention in the last 3 years. They are a kind of active (Bonwell & Eison, 1991), experiential learning (Kolb, 1976; 1981; Kolb & Kolb, 2005), presenting particular features. The students organised in small groups, act as consultants to a real life commissioner (business, DMO, business association, local government) for a real "live" problem or development opportunity that the commissioner needs to explore and achieve. The commissioner/business contact interacts directly with the group of students-consultants in terms of providing an appropriate brief for a new opportunity or analysis of an existing problem or issue as well as providing appropriate feedback.

Undertaken from a different perspective to other kinds of active or experiential learning (case studies, in class simulation), students' consultancy not only allows the students to 'do' rather than receive, but to engage in a real world business problem (Moulding & Montaguti, 2011; Heriot *et al.*, 2008), training them to face ambiguous situations in a professional manner (Cook & Bellivau, 2006).

The growing interest towards this particular kind of learning approach at university level is due to its ability to develop transferrable and critical thinking skills (Gonzalez, *et al.*, 1999; Rideout, *et al.*, 2002; Thomas & Busby, 2003), less addressed by traditional teaching styles, which tend to be based mainly on a reproductive learning conception –

focussing on the intake of information for fact retention (Vermunt 1996; Slaats, *et al.*, 1999) – and/or a constructive learning conception (Stavenga de Jong, *et al.*, 2006).

However, team working, problem solving, communication, etc., are essential for employability (Thomas & Busby, 2003; Kuhn & Weinberger, 2005; Zaharim, *et al.*, 2009; Fallows & Steven, 2000), especially in the service sector (Chang, 2013), and even more importantly within a managerial career (Bigelow, 1991; Carroll & Gillen, 1987; Boyatzis, 1982; Whetten & Cameron, 1983; Analoui, *et al.*, 2000).

Despite the growing interest, and various attempts here and there to use this peculiar approach within courses and programmes, there is no common definition of what a live project is, and different lecturers who are trying to integrate it appear to be doing it on their own, without having much reference by other experiences, or guidelines on how to proceed.

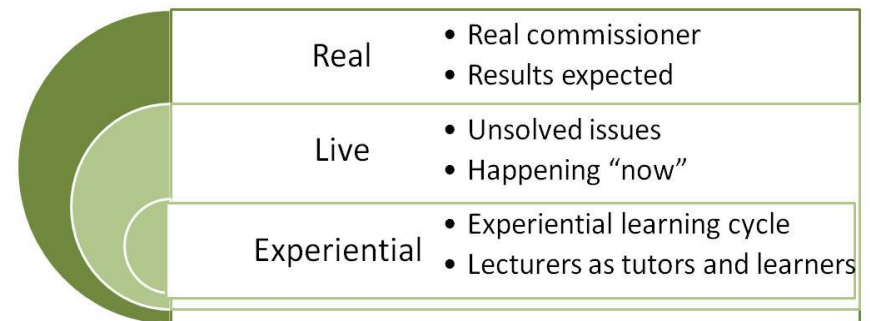


Fig. I.1. The main features of a live project

This handbook answers the need for a common ground and point of reference to introduce and manage live projects at HEIs.

2.1. What is a live project?

As discussed earlier, a live project within the role of Students' Consultancy is active (Bonwell & Eison, 1991) experiential learning (Kolb, 1976; 1981; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Boyatzis, 2002) experience whereby students engage in management consultancy roles (Moulding & Montaguti, 2015) in some form of live research enquiry assigned by an external business client.

As part of this collaborative partnership, the business client has an opportunity to interact directly with the student-consultants in terms of providing an appropriate brief for a new business opportunity or analysis of an existing problem and acts as an informal mentor. The live research enquiry would generally have specific reference to the qualification undertaken. It is possible for a Student Consultancy approach to develop as a separate stand-alone module within a programme curriculum; however other examples of live experiential approaches for student consultancy have consequently adopted the live project as an educational approach for both teaching and assessing the knowledge and skills within a separate module (Moulding & Montaguti, 2011), (for more details about this, see PART III).

The peculiarity of live projects, however, entails another advantage beyond the development of transferrable skills – an advantage that none of the other forms of experiential learning can bring (Cook, 2000; Cook & Hazelwood, 2002), but that is just marginally underlined by the literature. Students' Consultancy create the condition for a cooperation between teachers, businesses, and students, establishing a collaborative partnership leading to a “tripartite relationship” (see Part II – Par. 1.8.2) that is often strengthened by the emotional aspects that are part of this kind of experiences.

Despite the differences, the experiential learning context is unique and dynamic enabling students to engage with and receive experience of working in a managerial capacity within an organisation of their chosen industry. The consequent role of the unit leader, the supervisors and the external business clients are that of a mentor, consultant, advisor, and listener and on occasions as an arbitrator.

Some of the key concepts and principles of live projects within the role of Student Consultancy are identified as follows:

- a focus upon the development and acquisition of transversal skills, critical thinking and resolution of problems for today's dynamic managers;
- business clients offering their support in nurturing/mentoring;
- an overlap of time between the experiential learning process of understanding the role of consultancy

and what it entails while at the same time, undertaking the live project itself in a professional manner;

- an informal lecturing approach which focuses upon continuous encouragement, guidance and feedback;
- co-ordination of some skills and capabilities from other units and courses undertaken;
- development of CVs for students, identifying gaps for development;
- to identify with and act at all times within a professional capacity as actual external consultants as opposed to the role of a student;
- a share of tacit knowledge, transmitted by the lecturer and the commissioner by direct contact, behaviour imitation and shared experience;
- no *separation of 'skills' from content*, as the development of problem solving, organizational skills, communication, technical, etc., skills and critical thinking is not divorced from the subject matter;
- a three way learning involving student, lecturer, and commissioner.

Student Consultancy is not effectively introduced simply by proposing to the students a consultancy case. It is – as stated in the beginning – a form of experiential learning, hence it requires the following:

- a shift of focus for the learning goals: from more “traditional” academic ones to the acquirement of transversal skills, synthetic thinking, identification and resolution of problems;
- awareness and preparation in the application of the experiential learning cycle – do, reflect, conceptualise, apply (see Chapter 3);
- a teaching approach centered on dialogue and continuous feedback instead of lecturing;
- assessment tasks allowing the teacher to assess all the skills targeted, including the soft ones, in the learning goals and compel the students to develop those skills;
- a stronger coordination with the other courses in order to precisely know the knowledge and skills the students can build upon to develop their managerial competence.

The awareness of the features described so far is essential. Projects not managed in this way, especially in the lack of pedagogy, may be acknowledged as another kind of projects but not live projects as they are meant here.

2.2. Why do we need live projects?

1. Employability skills

Preparing students for effective, employability skills, particularly those related to managerial skills and competences including synthetic thinking, and relationship building has necessitated that curriculum development

reflects the needs and business practices of industry (Moulding & Montaguti, 2015). A number of pedagogic approaches have been highlighted over the years, ranging from industry work experiences, placements and internships, to industry related projects (Analoui, 1997; Bigelow, 1991; Entwistle & Peterson, 2004; Kallioinen, 2007) all of which have been introduced to enable students to gain appropriate skills for chosen industries and to learn from their specific experiences.

Traditional teaching methods tend to be based mainly on a reproductive learning conception – focussing on the intake of information for fact retention (Vermunt, 1996; Slaats, *et al.*, 1999) – and/or a constructive learning conception (Stavenga de Jong, *et al.*, 2006).

However, skills such as team working, problem solving, communication, etc., and critical thinking are essential for employability (Thomas & Busby, 2003; Kuhn & Weinberger, 2005; Zaharim, *et al.*, 2009; Fallows & Steven, 2000), especially in sectors such as service, and tourism in particular, (Chang, 2013), and even more importantly within a managerial career (Bigelow, 1991; Carroll & Gillen, 1987; Kotter, 1982; Cameron & Whetten, 1983; Analoui, *et al.*, 2000).

A survey carried out by the National Association of Colleges and Employers in the US shows that employers value five qualities as the most important for their staff. These are mainly transversal skills such as communication, autonomy, team-working, leadership. The academic

achievement is the fifth of the group and the only non-transversal one (Kuhn & Weinberger, 2005). The same results are reported by several studies (Luka & Donina, 2012; Zehrer & Mössenlechner, 2009; Christou & Sigala, 2001; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005; Rao, 2010; Selvadurai, *et al.*, 2012; Bath, *et al.*, 2004). Other surveys conducted in the UK (Davies, *et al.*, 2012), Germany (Strietska-Ilina & Tessaring, 2005), Italy (CISSET, 2015) underline the same gaps and requests.

2. *Getting theory/practice, content/competencies together: keep the learners engaged*

From the students point of view, this approach to learning seems to create the impression that “theory” and “practice” are two different realms (Valentine & Speece, 2002), never touching each-other, and that what they learn at school and at university is “just” theory i.e. knowledge perceived as useless (Hascher, Cocard,& Moser, 2004) – possibly because it is “inert”(Mandl, Gruber & Renkl ,1996). In fact, in the traditional approach to learning, classes are for knowledge, while the practical aspect is left to learning by doing. This fosters somehow the idea that the two realms have nothing to do with each other.

While other experiences and active learning methods can help developing transferrable skills, those are not usually good to retain content (Bonesso, *et al.*, 2015). However, live projects within the role of Students Consultancy, use an experiential learning approach, but content is essential to achieve the brief, and more than other approaches, it

reveals that said content is relevant not only from the academic but from the practical real perspective.

3. Supporting conscious choices of career

Keeping the students' perspective, another reason why live projects can effectively be used in HEIs curriculum is that students will be able to “touch” what being a manager in a given sector really means.

“I would like to become an Events Manager / Wedding Planner” is possibly one of the most common career interests in the experience of the authors. Rarely, however, the students have an understanding of the complexity of the role and its main duties (including the least attractive! i.e.: waking up at 3am, and working during the weekends among many others) .

Meetings with business representatives and placements can help students to understand which hard and soft skills they should improve, how to focus their experiences prior to a position as an Event Manager, or to reject the option realizing that it wasn't what they were really looking for. Live projects imply a longer exposition to the manager real life than a meeting (as placement) but, differently from placement, the students are dealing with the most complex problems and activities. Therefore, live projects provide them a concrete idea of what a specific job means and requires, anticipating somehow their future as managers, and also allowing them to test their attitudes and skills.

4. Be ready for the 4.0 – and further – jobs and

business environment: teach the learners how to go on learning

Furthermore, the impact of robotics and AI is destined to change many of the jobs we know in the service sector. A study by MCKynsey (2016) suggests that machines can already do the 60% of jobs. In particular, 75% of the hours employed in the hospitality and restaurant business can be carried out by automation systems. What are more subjected to automation are standardised and repetitive activities – i.e. most of the activities related to operating processes in the service sector. AI, robotics and service automation are already a reality in the tourism and hospitality business (Ivanov & Webster, 2017) – e.g., automatic check-in/out, chatbots, etc., – but also in the insurance, banking, law business.

Many jobs are destined to change dramatically, and it is probable that there will be other important changes on the horizon after 4.0.

With this perspective in mind, it will be less essential for companies to pay people to supervise activities and processes, but instead they will be looking for people who are able to handle very complex matters, be creative, maintain and create relationships, etc.

Most of all, since their business models are destined to change, employers are already looking for people able “to learn” (CISSET, 2015; Mingotto & Montaguti, 2017), i.e. to use knowledge to transform their jobs and their business.

In this perspective, reproductive learning might not be the best kind of approach to learning for the students, and future professionals, to rely upon, and there is a need to reinforce the message that knowledge is not static.

5. Be relevant and not replaceable

From the lecturers point of view, it is important to underline that information is available everywhere. *Google* and *Youtube* are some of the most common fonts of data on any topic searched. In less than a second you get responses to any question you ask. If you give your queries to *Siri* or *Cortana*, you may not have to move a muscle while lying on the sofa. This becomes a daunting challenge for any professional dedicated to sharing knowledge and calls for a global in depth reflection concerning their role in the future.

If HEIs and lecturers in their daily practice and actual pedagogy reinforce somehow the idea that education is “the process of accumulating the separate ‘pieces’ of knowledge provided, ready-made, from a teacher or other sources” (Entwistle & Peterson, 2004) there is the risk that lecturers and lectures would be perceived more and more as replaceable by tutorials and search engines.



Fig. I.2. Benefits of live projects from HEIs, students, and lecturers' point of view.

Furthermore, the introduction of Student Consultancy may result in a valuable approach not only to guarantee better employability and careers to future professionals, but also to strengthen the future researchers' and teachers' skills – who also need soft skills and an ability to “talk” to businesses (Robert's Review, 2002) – thus resulting in general improvement of the high education programmes (Moulding & Montaguti, 2013).

2.3. Live projects within higher education

The interest towards this particular kind of experiential learning approach at university level is due to its ability to develop transferrable and critical thinking skills (Gonzalez,

et al., 1999; Edwards *et al.*, 1998; Rideout, *et al.*, 2002; Thomas & Busby, 2003), which – for the reasons explained in previous paragraphs – is less addressed by traditional teaching styles.

As partially foretold, Student Consultancy projects are undertaken from a different perspective to other types of experiential learning, for example case studies, and in-class simulations. A Student Consultancy unit, for example, not only allows students to 'do' rather than receive, but also to engage in real world business problems and dilemmas faced by business managers, owners and entrepreneurs (Moulding & Montaguti, 2011; Heriot *et al.*, 2008), enabling students ultimately to face ambiguous situations within a professional manner (Cook & Bellivau, 2006).

For the link between content and practice, then, live projects are a kind of experiential learning that might be particularly suitable for HEIs programmes.

Some courses can be more or less suitable for this approach and to apply it at the undergraduate level requires more attention than to use it at the post-graduate one, but there are few subjects that won't benefit from this approach.

So far, experiential learning approaches such as Problem Based Learning are often integrated into nurses' curricula and medicine programmes (Valle, *et al.*, 1999), and simulations are becoming more popular (Sower, 1997). These approaches are none the less more predictable and

controllable than Students' Consultancy (McKone & Bozevich, 2003). Because of this unpredictability and for being time consuming (Heriot & Campbell, 2002) Students' Consultancy is rarely integrated into a curriculum. Some examples are computer sciences' programmes (Drake, 2012) and architecture in the UK (Sara, 2006), some MBAs (Sroufe & Ramos, 2011) and a particular project of the Small Business Institute in the US (Heriot, *et al.*, 2008), some experience within operational management (Heriot, *et al.*, 2008).

Another reason why live projects within the role of Students' Consultancy are particularly interesting for HEIs is linked to their growing need and research for co-operation with the industry (Barrett *et al.*, 2000; Gertner *et al.*, 2011; Powers, 2003; Ankrah & Omar, 2015). As it will be illustrated in part II, the development of Students' Consultancy can be a very effective way to start collaboration with industry, especially when the businesses are SMEs, that are looking for innovation, but have to overcome a tradition of poor investment in education (Matlay & Hyland, 1999), some basic distrust in academia, and therefore, need to have a closer personal relationship with lecturers (Demain, 2001), and students.

2.4. Live projects and experiential learning

As said, a live project is a particular kind of active (Bonwell & Eison, 1991) experiential learning (Kolb, 1976; 1981; Kolb & Kolb, 2005), and present particular features.

The authors of this guidebook underline often and in different parts of the book that it is not possible to introduce live projects within the role of Students' Consultancy without an experiential learning approach.

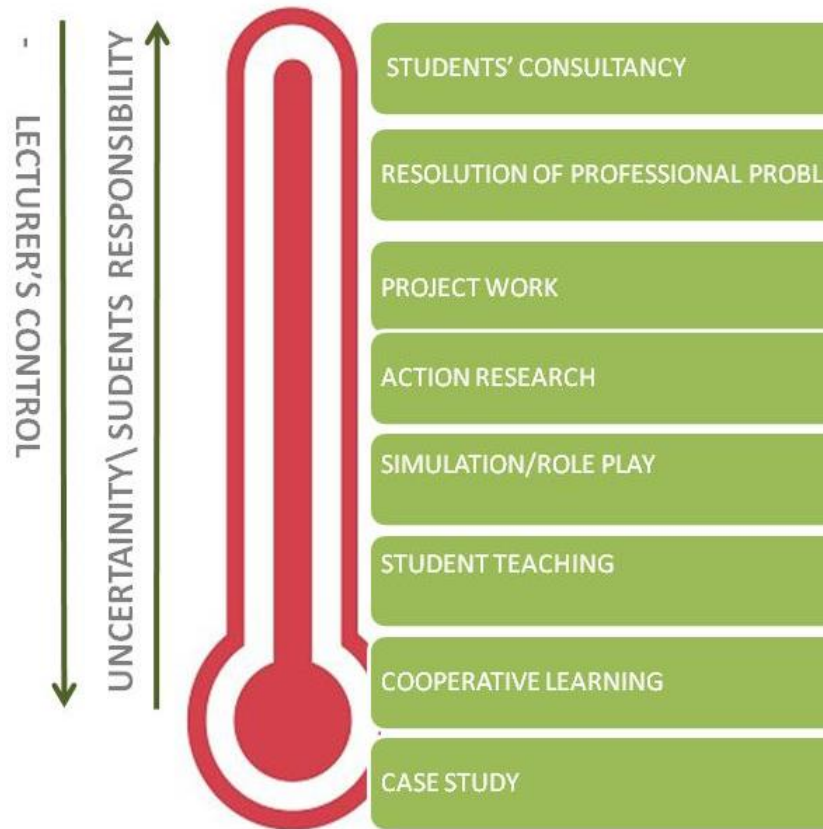


Fig. I.3. Chart of different experiential learning possibilities according to the students' level of responsibility

Otherwise, even if the students are engaged with a “live” problem by a commissioner, the risk is to reproduce again

– at least partially – the traditional duality between “theory” and “learning by doing”.

Furthermore, as underlined in the first chapter, the introduction of a “special” project without a further reflection about pedagogy – or better “paideia” or andragogy – is in danger of generating “a pedagogy without pedagogy”, which might be a problem when dealing with Students' Consultancy, as it is the kind of learning that implies a high level of risk and failure for the students.

As it will be underlined, there are many different approaches and possibilities to experiential learning, such as Problem Based Learning (PBL), inquiry based learning, field activities, etc.

Live projects share with all those other possibilities the use of the same pedagogy and learning approach, but, in an ideal chart of the different possibilities, they represent the one where

- the risk of failure is the highest, and the most intense, as the students don't risk only not passing an exam, but to give a bad impression to someone who could be their employer;
- the control the lecturer has on the results of the learning process and of the consultancy itself is the lowest;
- the control the lecturer has on the process itself is not so high as in other situations (PBL);

- the high level of risk is linked to commissioners, their needs and expectations;
- the fact that the students act partially within the university environment, and partially in the commissioner's world, i.e. if they fail they can't tell themselves that "in the real world it is another story";
- the impossibility for the lecturer to pack the entire process and the case for the students, as he/she also doesn't have all the information and the answers;
- the connection between content and skills to be learned.

For those reasons, the following chapter is dedicated to experiential learning and its basics.

3. Experiential Learning

For a long time researchers have been interested in understanding where knowledge comes from and how people come to know. The perception of learning is the view a person involved in teaching activities has of the process of learning (Holmberg & Ritalahti, 2017). How people learn has generated different and even conflicting views (see e.g., van Rossum and Hamer, 2010). Learning is generally seen as a change in behaviour or the capacity to behave in a given way (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). At universities teacher-centred approaches have been dominating for a long time (Holmberg and Ritalahti, 2017). The different learning perceptions are (van Rossum and Hamer, 2010):

- **the traditional view** emphasizes learning as an **increase of knowledge**;
- **the second view** emphasizes learning as **memorising**;
- **the third view** emphasizes learning as **acquiring facts or procedures** etc., that can be used in practice;
- **the fourth view** states that learning is about **making a meaning** of facts and procedures, and a student is seen here as an active agent;
- **the fifth view** is about learning to **make sense and to understand reality** at the individual level. Furthermore, learning can be used for widening the horizons.

This chapter explores the concept of experiential learning and its constructs. Since experiential learning has its roots in a constructivist epistemology, the chapter starts by outlining the key epistemological assumptions underlying experiential learning. The chapter continues with discussing the learning styles linked to experiential learning and shows the role of different actors involved in experiential learning. In addition, the chapter presents various forms of experiential learning styles. It contrasts the experiential learning with other forms of learning. By doing so, the aim is to present advantages of experiential learning that are fundamental for educational institutions and for success in modern learning process. The chapter highlights some key approaches and methodologies used to support experiential learning. It ends with proposition and discussion on how educational institutions could use this learning approach to fertilize active learning processes to match today and future industry requirements..

3.1. Constructivism and learning

The three main perspectives of how people learn have dominated the debate during the years: behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism. (Ertmer and Newby, 2013). The perspective that has influenced the pedagogical change at universities towards Students' Consultancy projects and experiential learning is constructivism. Basically, constructivism emphasizes that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world

through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences (Bhattacharjee, 2015).

Constructivism views each learner as an individual with unique needs and backgrounds consistently constructing the understanding of the world. The learner is complex, active and multidimensional (Bhattacharjee, 2015). Constructivism emphasizes that learning is both a social and personal process (Ertmer and Newby, 2013; Tsapatsoulis, 2018). Some key developments that enhance the growing impact of constructivism in pedagogical thinking according to Ertmer and Newby (2013) are following:

- 1) Modern technology allowing the immediate access to information (computers, smartphones).
- 2) New generation of learners demanding learning experiences based on activities and interaction.
- 3) Employers asking for graduates with skills such as problem solving, creativity and critical thinking.

The intensive debate about the need for new pedagogical thinking has resulted in discussion about new concepts such as transformative and active learning that will be introduced next.

3.2. Transformative learning

Transformative learning is a topic mostly discussed in the context of adult education (Wang and King, 2006) and

primarily developed by Mezirow (1999; 2006). The roots of transformative learning are in constructivism (Cranton and Taylor, 2012). Transformative theory emphasizes the process of "perspective transformation" that has three dimensions (Mezirow, 2006): psychological (changes in understanding of the self), convictional (revision of belief systems), and behavioural (changes in lifestyle). Achieving meaning and balance in life is one key feature of the theory of transformative learning (Fleming, 2018; Taylor, 2008).

According to transformative learning theory, students involved in learning process will learn through critical reflection by questioning their own beliefs and values resulting discovery of new insights. When students consider the topics in focus for learning from different angles they will gain confidence in their abilities and thereby will in the future be prepared to test new beliefs, ideologies and experiences (Wang & King, 2006). Thus, according to transformative learning theory it is important that students constantly are forced to question their own beliefs and assumptions because if they are allowed to think uncritically their decision-making will be based on stereotypes and previous experience. If these stereotypes and previous beliefs are rejected, transformation will take place (Cranton and Taylor, 2012).

3.3. Active learning

Active learning is a form of learning in which teaching strives to involve students in the learning process. The

starting point is that learning is more durable when students are actively engaged in the learning process (Johnson & Johnson, 2018; Pearson, 2019). As transformative learning, constructivism has strongly influenced the development of active learning pedagogy. In active learning, the focus is on doing and reflecting upon what has been done (Brame, 2016).

Three main processes have been identified for implementing active learning in practice. Pearson (2019, originally by Meyer 2011) highlights the selection of relevant material, organising of the material, and relating it to existing knowledge. Mental processing is crucial, active learning is not necessarily about physical activity as commonly perceived. Thus, also traditional lectures can be based on an active learning approach as long as the cognitive thinking of students is stimulated (Pearson, 2019; Brame, 2016). Active learning also emphasizes collaboration in groups, since social interaction enhances learning. Moreover, active learning approaches support inclusivity and support disadvantaged students (Brame, 2016).

Table I.1: A comparison of an instructor role

Formal/Passive Learning Role of a teacher	Active Learning Role of a teacher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Verbalizes information; - Checks if students know instructions; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Act as a facilitator; - Promote discovery; - Foster dialogue, discuss; - Ask the right questions;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expects students to follow the instructions exactly; - Problems on the board; - Gives students a graded assignment to solve similar problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Act as a guide of reflective conversation during the process; - Recognize emotions and feelings; - Encourage involvement; - Reflect using analytic skills; - Give feedback and monitor; - Build trust and care; - Career facilitation.
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Table I.2: Role of a learner – A comparison

Table 1 summarises the role of a teacher in active learning compared to more traditional passive learning.

Table 2 shows the role and responsibilities of a learner (student) in a traditional classroom setting where the teacher is the expert and the learner is expected to passively listen compared to pedagogy emphasizing active learning.

The philosophy of active learning has contributed to several standardised processes for students to learn, experiential learning is the one chosen for this guidebook.

3.4. Experiential learning in practice

Confucius stated already 450 BC that “I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand” (Northern Illinois University, 2019). The modern definition of experiential learning has its origin in the work by prominent social researchers in the beginning of 19th century. For instance, John Dewey developed the concept of “learning by doing”. Especially Kolb (e.g. 1984) further developed this thinking. Kolb highlights that:

“Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, 38).

Experiential learning is a pedagogical practice whereby students gain new knowledge, skills and abilities due to the intentional application of classroom learning in a workplace or simulated workplace setting. Experiential learning opportunities are based on an intentional learning cycle

Formal/Passive Learning Role of a learner	Experiential Learning (Active) Role of a learner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete reading and should understand it; - Expected to understand; - Complete assignments by following step-by-step instructions; - Must write a report to show understanding; - Passive listening; - Lack of initiative and flexibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learners must create norms; - Learners must welcome diversity; - Learners must become critical; - Through communicative learning; - Interactive and contact; - Actively sharing experience; - Work towards critical reflecting; - Actively participating; - Critically examine evidence, arguments; - Find alternate points of view which fosters collaborative learning; - Self-initiative and intention to learn; - Analytical skills and decision-making; - Problem solving skills and evaluation; - Dealing with uncertainty.

and clearly defined learning outcomes. They engage students actively in creating knowledge and critically reflecting on their experiences, allowing them to

understand how to transfer their knowledge and skills to future endeavours (Lachapelle and Whiteside, 2017). Therefore, in experiential learning, the students are responsible for their own learning, rather than being told what to do and when to do it (Schwartz, 2012).

3.4.1 The experiential learning cycle

Kolb (1984, 38) suggests that effective learning is reached when a person progresses through a cycle of four stages:

- having a concrete experience → followed by
- observation and reflection on that experience → that leads to
- the formation of abstract concepts (analysis) and generalizations (conclusions) → which are then used to
- test hypothesis in future situations, resulting in new experiences.

Learning can be seen as an integrated process with each stage being mutually supportive and feeding into the next. It is possible to enter the cycle at any stage and follow it through its logical sequence. However, effective learning only occurs when a learner can execute all four stages of the model. Therefore, no stage of the cycle is effective as a learning procedure on its own. Using the above reasoning as a springboard, experiential learning takes place when (Mainemelis, Boyatzis and Kolb, 2002):

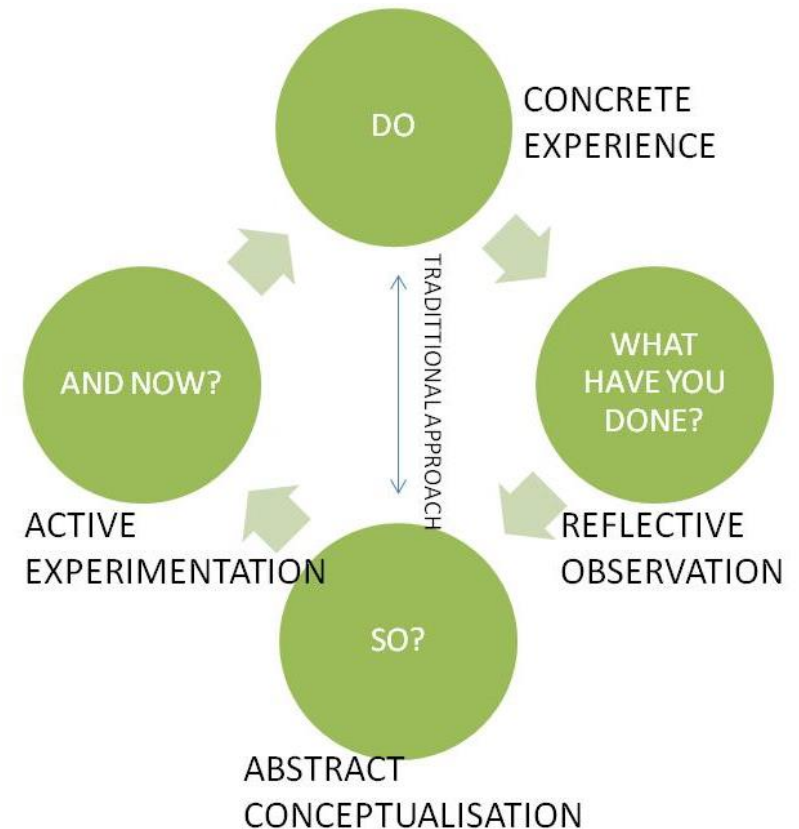


Fig. I.4. The experiential learning cycle

Experiential learning exists when a personally responsible participant cognitively, effectively, and behaviourally processes knowledge, skills, and/or attitude in a learning situation characterized by a high level of active involvement through critical reflections and thinking. Simply said, the learner together with other actors has her/his own background and experiences, which are used to make observations and to formulate an understanding of the

problem to be studied. The learner formulates reflections on how own experience could help to understand and to solve the given task or a problem. The involved reflects on what was learned, and evaluation and feedback are given by the teacher. The cycle starts again with new experience and new problems to solve, etc. Thus, experiential learning focuses on real-life challenges and preferably, new knowledge and solutions are created.

Finally, reflection is a crucial component of a successful experiential learning process; the starting point must be that students understand exactly what reflection is and how it deepens their learning. To do so, students should practice reflective writing and some discussions. Furthermore, exercises are needed to get students used to reflect upon their learning. During the studies, students' understanding of reflection should be deepened, resulting in a more complex ability to reflect upon their own learning (Schwartz, 2012).

3.4.2 Experiential learning and task structure

Furthermore, an overall experiential learning task structure has been proposed (e.g., Moallei and Rahmana, 2012, originally by Wolfe and Byrne, 1975). The four phases of experiential learning identified are design, conduct, evaluation and feedback (Moallei and Rahmana, 2012).

Design: This phase involves the upfront efforts by the instructor to set the stage for the experience. It includes specification of aims and objectives, activities.

Conduct: This phase involves maintaining and controlling the design activities to sustain a favourable learning environment.

Evaluation: The instructor conducts the evaluation. However, opportunities for the learners to evaluate the learning experience themselves should be given.

Feedback: Feedback should be an almost continuous process for the pre-experience introduction through the final debriefing.

3.5. Experiential learning and work placement

Internship meets most of the criteria of the experiential learning easily (King and Zhang, 2017). It is participative, interactive, has the contact with the environment and has variability/uncertainty. Students spend a certain time at the university to complete some studies before going to the internship. They are then expected to have some sort of solid ground before going to external environment for internship. In addition, in most circumstances and before getting credits for internship, students are required to provide for internship evaluation and feedback from the supervisor and to provide own reflection on the learning process and outcome.

Since the internship is taking place outside the university, structure and feedback from the school's point of view may be lacking. Consequently, the internship period tend to vary

greatly, from one that actually has negative learning (poor work attitudes, for example) to extremely positive experiences. In order to maximize the benefits, control and coordination of the internship, it requires wide cooperation and good relationship between university and business that requires a great effort from the part of the faculty or department or study program in charge (see e.g., Fanning, Macleod and Vanzo, 2017) .

Therefore, although it is a good opportunity for experiential learning, a placement is not that easily transformed into experiential learning or into a form of Students' Consultancy, as this might require the following:

- changes in how the placement is chosen, organised, tutored;
- a much more intense involvement of the lecturer in supervising the placement;
- a direct contact between the lecturer and the business hosting the student (see the tripartite relationship in PART II - 1.1.);
- ensuring that an experiential learning circle is activated.

3.6. Different ways to implement experiential learning

Experiential learning can be implemented in different ways: the following paragraphs explore more in detail three main possibilities:

- inquiry learning
- problem based learning
- project based learning

3.6.1. Inquiry learning

Inquiry learning is an approach strongly influenced by constructivism. It emphasizes that the student is an active agent and the learning is a social process. Compared to more traditional pedagogical approaches, students are empowered to create their own learning objectives (with the support of the teachers involved). Students learn primarily in real-life projects commissioned by companies. Thus, the whole learning process is not defined in the beginning of the semester; rather it is open and adapted according to the needs of the project. (Birkle, Holmberg, Karlqvist and Ritalahti, 2017; Holmberg & Ritalahti, 2017). The objective of inquiry learning is to create learning environments where students can acquire professional skills to cope in work life (Ritalahti, 2015). Given the fact that students have different background, inquiry learning emphasizes the fact that the learning environment must be transparent and support diversity.

Compared to experiential learning that also can be implemented through internship and field trips, inquiry learning is always about learning in projects with a team of students. Theoretical knowledge is important and all

project work is embedded in a theoretical frame (Holmberg & Ritalahti, 2017).

In order to achieve the optimal learning experience, the learning environment should be safe, complaisant and exciting. These characteristics of learning environment would make the learner active and use eclectic attentiveness effectively. Learning atmosphere plays an important role in what is actually possible to learn. If the learning environment is safe enough the learner can feel free to take risks and question his/her own thinking as well as others (Ritalahti, 2015). To be successful, inquiry learning fosters social interaction and that is acknowledged to have a greater impact on the learning process as well. For instance, there is no doubt about the fact that interaction either in form of conversation or acting together reveals individuals' thinking processes. This creates a foundation for learning from other students and an opportunity to reflect one's own expectations and notions (Morgan, 2014). In this perspective, both individual features and social equity and interaction within social networks may have profound influences on individual development (Kerzner, 2009).

3.6.2. Problem Based Learning

Problem-based learning (PBL) is a pedagogical approach where students learn through problem solving, i. e. students learn through focusing on a complex problem that can be studied from many different angles. Students work

in groups to identify what they need to learn to solve a problem (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). It provides students with practical skills to deal with confusing situations (problems) and themselves to define their knowledge gaps in the context of a specific problem, which they need to solve before they acquire the whole theoretical knowledge on a specific topic.

Compared to inquiry learning the focus is often on desktop research and complex problems which are studied and solved through reading and discussion.

The problem-based learning (PBL) is a method ensuring active interaction between the teacher and the student throughout the process.

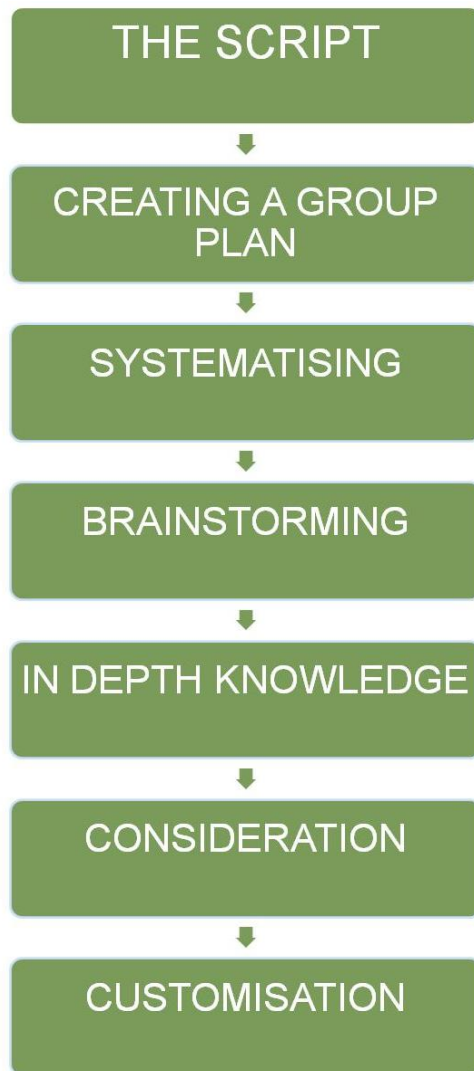


Fig. I.7. Problem Based Learning: the steps

One of the most important PBL conditions is active participation, in which students actively and creatively think, solve cognitive and practical problems and try to

understand and master the essence of the educational material.

Problem based learning steps are:

- "The Script". Provides a problem that students do not know in advance. Clarifies unknown concepts and terms.
- "Creating a Group Plan". Students investigate the problem, try to find answers to questions.
- "Systematic". By analyzing the problem, students find out the key mechanisms and develop possible explanations, raise the hypotheses of the problem.
- Reflection by group knowledge "or" Brainstorming ". During this stage, each member of the group expresses his opinion and ideas. All of them are recorded, evaluated, grouped.
- "Formulating Learning Objectives". At this stage, students set tasks and goals through which goals will be realized.
- "In-depth knowledge". This stage involves self-study, self-interest. Each student works independently, studies references and uses other methods to find answers to the questions.
- "Considerations and Careful Knowledge Search". Students gather again in a group, share knowledge, information, systemize, process, integrate knowledge.
- "Customization". The purpose of the newly-acquired information is to address the specific problem.

The problem-based learning process takes place in a group that typically consists of 4-8 people. The roles of problem - based learning participants are usually as follows:

- Discussion leader (a student) – s/he leads the group during the process;
- Secretary – his/her main function - to record the ideas expressed in the group;
- A member of the group – s/he is involved in discussions, shares information with others.
- Each student at least once becomes as the head and/or a secretary of the group;
- Lecturer's role in problem- based learning.

Similarly to other experiential learning approaches, the lecturer plays the role of a tutor. The tutor presents the problem to the students. S/He monitors how students work in a group, participates in every step of the problem solving.

The most useful aspect of the process is the ability of the tutor to assess the student's ability to solve the problem. An insightful tutor can easily measure the ability of each student to read through concepts, learning skills, knowledge (for more information about the features and role of lecturers and tutors in experiential learning in general and Students' Consultancy in particular (see Part II, Chapter 3, for Tutorial continuous assessment see Part III. Par 2.7., 2.8.).

Furthermore, each student must evaluate his/ her individual contribution to the group work process, and how efficiently the group worked together.

3.6.4. Experiential learning and live projects

The third approach, which meets the criteria well, is the Project Based Learning/live case which is the main focus of this guidebook.

More will be explained in detail in the following chapters, but the typical project requires the students to determine information need, obtain background information, develop a questionnaire and collect data and analyze it, write a report and present it to the client. Thus, participation and interaction are thus very prominent in the process, as is contact with the environment.

In terms of pedagogy, the project based learning presents opportunity to the instructor to monitor the progress of the project. Moreover, such monitoring is crucial in order to assure that the client/business gets something of value at the end. Thus, the project based learning can be **classified as being very high in experiential learning potential** (Gantry, 1990).

Guidance from the instructor is crucial, both in form of deadline and interim reports that insure the completion of the project by the end of a specified period (for example a semester). In addition, the instructor is responsible for the teaching of the content which is then used in the research

process. Students provide and get feedback in most of various stages, especially at data collection and analysis phase.

Most students learn about themselves as they contact time pressured business individuals who do not want to be bothered.

3.7. Learning styles

Besides the experiential learning model described in paragraph 3.4.1., Kolb also developed a learning styles inventory (1976), updated in 2013 (Kolb & Kolb, 2013). These learning styles explain the way each individual gets through the learning cycle on the basis of his/her preference for one of four main different learning approaches.

These four primary learning styles are: diverging, assimilating, converging and accommodating (Kolb, 1976; 1981).

Each of these main styles can be described as a blend of the way the person acquires and uses information. Based on this preference, each learning style also shows certain attitudes and abilities in regard to the learning process.

An individual's specific learning style can therefore be defined by a precise combination of preferences for the four primary learning modes. Each combination is unique, as every individual is.

Based on Kolb (1976) and Cox (2017), each of the primary learning styles is briefly described in the following lines.

Divergers (feeling and watching) – learners who ask mainly “why”?

The Divergers are able to look at a problem or a situation from different perspectives. They tend to gather information and use imagination to solve problems and perform better in situations that require ideas-generation, for example, brainstorming. People with a diverging learning style like both concrete experience and reflective observation, and are often people-oriented.

Assimilators (watching and thinking) – learners who ask “what”?

The Assimilators like a concise, logical approach. Their best ability is to produce a coherent explanation from a variety of observations, as they are good at organising a large amount of information in a clear, logical format. These kinds of learners prefer a clear explanation rather than practical opportunities, and are more focussed on ideas and abstract concepts than on people. In learning situations, people with this style prefer readings, lectures, exploring analytical models.

Convergers (doing and thinking) – learners who ask mainly “how”?

People with a converging learning style prefer to use their learning to find solutions to practical issues. They perform

better in situations where there is a single correct answer to a problem, and where they can employ a hypothesis testing approach. In fact, they like to experiment, simulate, and to work with practical applications. They favour technical tasks, and are less concerned with people and interpersonal aspects. Their greatest strength lies in the practical application of ideas.

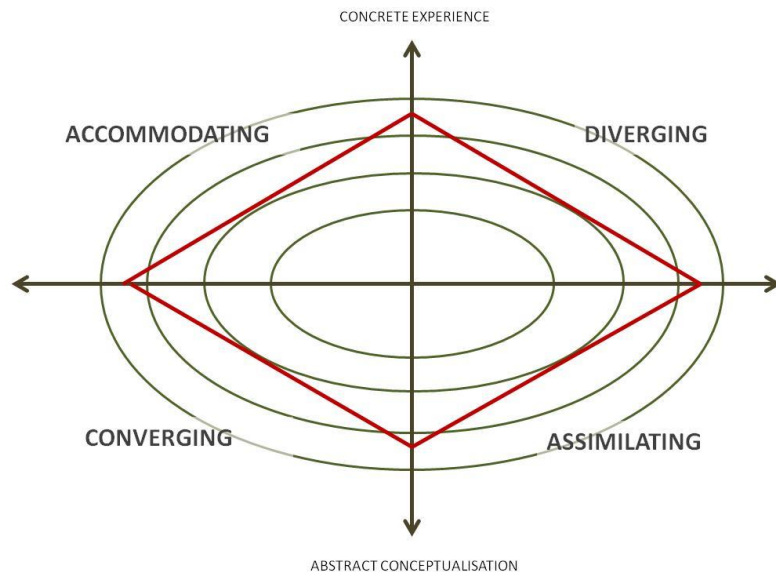


Fig. I.8. Learning styles and the experiential learning cycle

Accommodators (doing and feeling) – learners who ask “what if”?

The Accommodating learning style is a 'hands-on' one. Accommodators excel in situations where there is a need for adapting quickly, and prefer to take a practical approach. They use intuition and trial-and-error approaches to solve

problems, and they tend to rely on information being given by others rather than collecting and analyzing things by themselves. They are attracted to new challenges and experiences, and to carrying out plans. This learning style is the prevalent one within the general population.

One of the major uses of the learning styles is the understanding how students learn and helping them to learn more effectively. Knowing their less preferred learning styles, it is in fact possible to support them to strengthen these weak modes through the application of the experiential learning cycle.

<p>ACCOMMODATORS What if?</p> <p>'hands-on,' they rely on intuition rather than logic. They use other people's analysis, and prefer to take a practical approach</p>	<p>DIVERGERS Why?</p> <p>able to look at things from different perspectives, they tend to gather information and use imagination to solve problems</p>
<p>CONVERGERS What?</p> <p>They use their learning to find solutions to practical issues. They prefer technical tasks and are good at solving problems and making decisions.</p>	<p>ASSIMILATORS How?</p> <p>They rely on ideas and concepts and excel at understanding wide-ranging information and organizing it in a clear, logical format</p>

Fig. I.9. The 4 main learning styles

3.8. Implication for educational institutions

As underlined so far, in an experiential learning approach the learner plays an active role, while in the traditional lecturing adopted by the majority of courses offered at HEIs, the learner is mainly passive.

Thus, a change towards experiential learning implies for them to reduce the emphasis on the lecturer and the content and shifting it towards the learner (Gamoran, Secada, & Marrett, 1998). This dramatic change of role means that the lecturer needs to develop and use a different set of skills (Brownstein, 2001), as s/he acts more as a facilitator and delegator than a teacher in the traditional sense (Kotila & Mäki, 2008; Rhodes & Bellamy, 1999), and has to assume multiple roles, such as consultant and coach (Savery & Duffy, 1994).

In the inquiry/problem/project based approaches described so far, the instructors and learners interact around and interface the task, project or the problem. This somehow forces them to be aware of their respective point of views and values, and to be conscious that the learning experience is both subjective and objective at the same time. The instructor and the learners are equally involved in learning from each other (Holt and Willard-Holt, 2000).

Although it is essential to give the learner ownership of the problem and solution process, it does not mean that any activity or any solution is satisfactory. In this context, another key element for HEIs – that usually heavily

structures the learning process – is to achieve instead the right balance between the degree of structure and flexibility of the learning process, as very structured learning environment can make it harder for the learners to construct meaning based on their own conceptual understanding (Savery & Duffy, 1994).

Another shift that differentiates experiential learning from traditional didactic approaches, is that learners should be constantly engaged and challenged with tasks that refer to skills and knowledge just beyond their current level of mastery. To fully engage and challenge the learner, the task and learning environment should reflect the complexity of the environment that the learner should be able to function in at the end of learning (Ritalahti, 2015; Savery & Duffy, 1994). An authentic learning environment should provide “a context that reflects the way knowledge and skills will be used in real life” (Gulikers, Bastiaens & Martens, 2005, p. 509).

Depending on which level students are classified, some groups may deal with less complicated problems (projects) while others may deal with far advanced and complex problems (projects).

The following chapters will explore in depth how to realise the shift towards experiential learning within HEIs, and more in detail how to implement and manage live projects within the role of Students' Consultancy, describing the role of the lecturer/facilitator, how to lead the students and the

commissioner, how to adapt learning goals and the course syllabus.

CASE STUDIES – TESTING THE WATERS. TOWARDS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND LIVE PROJECTS

**CASE STUDY 1. LOOKING FOR A BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE,
Simulated guided tours in the “Tourism Guide” course
(Bachelor’s Degree in Tourism, Universitat Autònoma de
Barcelona)**

Teaching staff: Maria Abril

INTRODUCTION

The “Tourism Guide” course is included in the Bachelor’s Degree in Tourism at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). It is an optional training of 3 ECTS credits done in the fourth year. The general objective of the course is to understand the characteristics and operations of the guided activity and advise groups of visitors to the tourist destination. The focus of the course is practical and the theoretical content is intended to be applied in the form of exercises and simulations of cases in guided tours for locals, rather than accompanying of international groups, although the training serves for both purposes.

OBJECTIVES AND TEACHING METHODS

The objective is that a student (individually!) has a cultural resource that he/she should present, based on guidelines, as a local tourist guide. The final result, after the training,

should be: “to feel that the student is a guide, not that he or she acts as a guide” (M. Abril, interview, June 18th, 2018).

The objectives of the course are:

1. Understanding the concept of guided tours, assistance, advice and planning of activities in relation to the role of a tourist guide.
2. Identifying the elements involved in guided activities.
3. Understanding the dynamics of groups from the perspective of tourist groups.
4. Listing, describing and planning each phase of the design and programming processes of the activities in which a tourist guide participates.
5. Observe the legislation used in each specific case.

These objectives are focused on professionalization: “it’s what any guided tours company asks” (M. Abril, interview, June 18th, 2018).

The sessions of the course merge theory and practice. There is a distribution between classroom training (theoretical classes and workshops) and the final field simulation. The workshops are essential; their aim is to provide students with the tools to practice professionally: how to breathe, pace, structure a speech, structure a visit, have a general overview of

the group without paying attention to a single person and/or point, project the voice and perform different intonations, use the microphone, have confidence, act as a leader, etc. Each workshop represents a stage in preparing a student to be ready to work as a guide. In order to optimally develop the training there is a maximum capacity of 30 students. A student number exceeding this figure means organizing and customizing the workshops is unfeasible.

OUTPUT AND APPLIED CASE

The merge between theory and practice culminates at the end of the training with a site visit, which is a simulation of a guided tour. This is the most complicated part of managing, but totally necessary to achieve professionalism. At the end of the training, the group of students must conduct a guided tour in Barcelona for 2 days (a total of 4 hours).

During the simulation, individual students must show that they have understood the training. This is very practical and real, because the context is the city (a space that is very live). While guiding the visit, students are under more pressure: “Students appreciate that what is learnt in the duration of the course is transformed and acquires reality at the time of the visit. It's true, there is no falsehood, it's in real time” (M. Abril, interview, June 18th, 2018).

There is no service offered to a real-life tourist. It is an assignment of the subject represented as a simulation. The teacher plays the role of the company and the students are the audience. The teacher also encourages students to invite people who are not part of the student group to come on the day of the activity.

EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING

The didactic methodologies require the participation of the student with the need to attend class regularly. The active participation of the student contributes positively both in the continuous assessment and in the final evaluation (10%). For the evaluation of the concepts of theoretical classes and workshops there is a single exam that has a value of 40% of the final grade. Finally, the design and realization of the visit to the city of Barcelona, as a pedagogical tool for real practice that integrates everything that students have done in class, has a value of 50%. In this latest evaluation project, the trainer (and an observer at the same time!) does not intervene in the situation to avoid influencing the implementation of cultural resources guiding. An individual report is given at a later stage.

LESSONS LEARNED

The student develops and simulates the idea of practicing professionally by offering a tourist guide service. Students

connect with the professional reality of this role during the course. Pupils simulate the entire reality of tourist guiding, becoming guides of a product that they have created and set up. In addition, the structure and the dynamics are exciting. The number of students and sessions is presented as a restriction. Specific and personal training requires each student to integrate knowledge individually.

CASE STUDY 2. REFLECTING ON INTERNSHIP AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING.

The internships in two postgraduate courses of the School of Tourism and Hotel Management of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona .

Master's degree in Tourism and Humanities. Teaching staff: Maria Abril

Postgraduate course in Ecotourism and Nature-Guide - Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Teaching staff: Francesc Romagosa.

INTRODUCTION

The Master's degree in Tourism and Humanities and the postgraduate course in Ecotourism and Nature-Guide are initiatives of the School of Tourism and Hotel Management of the UAB. In both postgraduate courses the aim is to train professionals to offer added value and innovation to tourist products and services. In these programs students are expected to generate, manage content and bring new perspectives to tourism. Due to the similarities in the structure and work methodology, in both postgraduate courses, a common approach to the experiences of practical training is followed.

OBJECTIVES AND TEACHING METHODS

In the case of the Master's degree in Tourism and Humanities the objectives are focused on tourism professionalization in any area of content organisation and

management for cultural activities such as private companies, public institutions or not-for-profit organisations. In the case of the postgraduate diploma in Ecotourism and Nature-Guide the courses bring together existing specialization courses on the creation and management of products and companies relating to ecotourism/the nature-guide profession.

The teaching approach in these two postgraduate courses includes a practical module (aside from the theory): "In the case of the postgraduate course on Ecotourism there is an internship approach, in which the students stay between two and three months in a business or an institution, collaborating with them in a specific project or activity that they have to undertake under a commissioner's tutorship" (F. Romagosa, interview, June 8th, 2018). The approach adopted is to offer students the opportunity to learn different tasks where they can apply their knowledge. Students resolve customer problems in real time, and attend customers when they ask for information.

OUTPUT AND APPLIED CASE

For the internships to succeed, the participation of business or institution representatives acting as tutors is necessary. There is coordination and communication between the university and the business/institution representatives in the sense that teachers are informed about the tasks and progress that the students do during their time in the enterprise or an institution.

Thanks to the module of practices, there is a good cooperation with different associations and companies outside the university. Part of the **practices in the postgraduate courses can be presented as the Master's thesis**. It means a research work based on research standards.

EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING

The assessment of the internship is an important part of the final grade in the postgraduate course. In the postgraduate course on Ecotourism “the assessment weights 50% of the final mark of the course. So, we give it a lot of importance” (F. Romagosa, interview, June 8th, 2018).

In the evaluation of the internship, the tutor's feedback is also relevant: “The most important thing is the manager's opinion that counts for 70% of the evaluation, then the teacher's feedback which is 30%” (M. Abril, interview, June 6th, 2018). “The commissioners fill out an assessment sheet, where they give a grade for different topics related to the internship and a final grade. That final grade is, jointly with the teacher's assessment, the main component of the general final grade of the student's internship module” (F. Romagosa, interview, June 8th, 2018).

LESSONS LEARNED

According to the teacher's opinion, internships are a good way to approach experiential learning “regardless we refer to them as “live projects” or not, although stressing the “live project” component probably gives them a more emphasis

on that experiential learning” (F. Romagosa, interview, June 8th, 2018).

The transformation of non-traditional teaching activities into a live project is not difficult to achieve: “I think it should be very simple to change towards a live project. The main adjustments would be to emphasize the new orientation both to students and commissioners, and to make more effort on our side (the university) to coordinate the learning activities, the assessment process, etc.” (F. Romagosa, interview, June 8th, 2018).

Following the above idea, “there is a disconnection between university and business (at least in the field of tourist cultural services) and it is necessary to break it. Especially given that agencies claim constantly for cultural values such as heritage. There is a general fear and reluctance of the company. But live projects led by real industries with a need to solve problems could have low cost and, furthermore, a positive result” (M. Abril, interview, June 6th, 2018).

CASE STUDY 3. USING PROBLEM BASED LEARNING

Project Work of the Management of Trade and Service module

Management of Trade and Service Module.

Professional Bachelor's degree of Business

Management study programme – Utenos kolegija.

Teaching staff: Supervisor of the module lecturer

Rūta Puidokaitė-Savickienė

INTRODUCTION

Management of Trade and Service module is included in the Professional Bachelor's degree of Business Management study programme at Utenos kolegija.

This module is the optional specialization module which includes 3 subjects: Management of Trade and Service Enterprises - 4 ECTS credits; Financing of International Trade - 4 ECTS credits; Trade and Services Marketing - 4 ECTS credits.

The main aim of the module is to provide knowledge and practical skills to prepare optimal, economical calculations based enterprises activity plan. Students, having completed all the presented subjects, will be able to perform environment research of trade and services companies, to analyse activity indicators of trade and services companies, to choose marketing tools and

marketing plan development methodology, to apply trade and services companies' activities organization principles; to choose economical funding sources for foreign trade and acquire knowledge about international trade risk.

OBJECTIVES AND TEACHING METHODS

The objectives of the module are:

Describe peculiarities of the activity of trade and services companies.

Analyze the environment of trade and services company.

Perform trade and services company sensitivity analysis of activity indicators and prepare the marketing plan.

Analyze the international trade market, to choose appropriate financing instruments, sources, settlement forms and estimate risk possibility.

Each subject (Management of Trade and Service Enterprises; Financing of International Trade; Trade and Services Marketing) of specialization provides equal teaching hours of theoretical and practical lectures. The module has 6 tutorials.

The module is accomplished by a project work. A project work is prepared during the tutorials and self-study of teams. A team is made of 3-5 students. During the module studies, a team has 6 tutorials each, i.e. 1 tutorial per week. Module Supervisor leads the tutorials. Besides the supervisor, the lecturers of the subjects also provide

students with consulting on the project work issues by e-mail, in Moodle environment, etc.

OUTPUT AND APPLIED CASE

The aim of the project work is to carry out the environmental research of the selected real company, analyse the results of the trade or service company, apply the marketing tools and choose the methodology for the development of the marketing plan, apply the principles of the organization of trade and service enterprises, and select sources of financing for international trade.

Students choose the subject of analysis and distribute tasks. At this stage of work students or their groups combine work plan, discuss the specificity of the services/goods provided by the selected company, possible methods of analysis and other issues raised.

The developing of the project work of the Management of Trade and Service module is one of the forms of student self-study. Students prepare for the project work, learn how to manage large-scale information acquired in various subjects, to understand and analyse market processes, to base decisions on marketing and service management, to formulate conclusions and suggestions.

During the first tutorial, the members of the group share roles:

Group Leader. His/her task is to ensure a systematic discussion process and lead the group; encourage all the members of the group to work; support the dynamics of the group; ensure that the team carries out the work performed; monitor the secretary to be able to write down and record everything accurately.

The secretary. His/ her task is to write on the board everything the group is discussing about; help to formulate the thoughts; participate in discussions; record the group's resources.

Assistant of the secretary. This is a student who rewrites the contents from the board, notes the most important arguments and ideas expressed in the panel discussions; carries out all the stated thoughts of the member of the group.

Other members of the group – participate in discussions; listen respectfully to others; ask questions; explore learning goals; share information with others.

In each discussion, roles are exchanged in such a way that each student at least once directs and secretaries the group (written on a board and on paper).

Problem Solving Steps:

Students of the group find out the problem scenario (short description about situation in the company);

Students use their knowledge to present their ideas on the identified problem and consider how it can be solved ("brainstorming");

The group seeks out the solutions through the discussion;

The group forms learning tasks;

Students work individually and obtain learning outcomes;

All student groups are gathering to present and discuss their solutions.

In solving problems, students rely on all sources of information: textbooks, journals, monographs, audiovisual media, slides, etc.

When the problem is solved, students analyse the work of their group: they assess the activity of the group members, the ability to reflect on the available knowledge, the ability to critically assess the self-acquired knowledge and the culture of communication. Each student also has to evaluate his/her individual work in different aspects: active issues in consideration; knowledge and skills from self-

study and input into the group process. After each student self-assessment, the supervisor encourages other students to form their opinions, whether they agree with it or not, or have any comments on the quality of the particular student's work. The supervisor also expresses his/her opinion.

EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING

The students' knowledge and abilities, acquired during tutorials and developing of the project work are assessed by other team members, supervisor of the module and all the teachers of the module. The final assessment includes the project work report (60%) and its presentation (40%).

LESSONS LEARNED

The team of students identifies or simulates the problem of the real company, then develops the idea and seeks for its solution, using and integrating their knowledge and practical skills, performing different roles in the team.

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Part Two

Managing Live projects

Acquired a good command of experiential learning methods, implementing a live project within the role of Students' Consultancy requires to create and maintain a relationship with businesses and the ability to guide students through a journey that implies more risk of failure than the usual lecture-exam cycle.

As described in the first part of this book a live project implies that the students consult a business or an organisation on a real specific problem or idea for development. For the lecturer, this means finding and creating a relationship with a business willing to be part of this, train the students to interact with the commissioner, supervise and guide the interaction.

This second part explores how to create and manage the relationship with the commissioner and the students and the role of the lecturer within this context.

1. The Commissioner

Any business choosing to work with a group of students engaged as Student Consultants demonstrates awareness and trust in the university's ability to develop competencies in an experiential learning environment.

Whichever path leads a business to entrust a Student Consultancy group with a project its goals are slightly different from the ones it might have in cooperating with a university department. Specifically the purposes of a business who decides to use this channel might be:

- to achieve the results for free or for less than the budget needed for a professional consultancy;
- to obtain a certain level of visibility within the community;
- to have a team passionate about their projects;
- to actively engage with a Higher Education provider;
- to actively engage with young people intending to enter the same industry in the future;
- to act as a mentor and advisor for young people and help towards their future employability options.

To achieve results for free or for less than the budget needed for a professional consultancy: live projects usually have the advantage, for the businesses involved, to be performed for free as the class has the benefit of working on a real case scenario and providing results that will be implemented in the company.

To obtain a certain level of visibility, for the business or the CEO/owner: beside the outcomes of the project, increasing visibility could be another reason for the company to look for the partnership of the higher education institution. The same applies to the higher education institution itself which can improve its image towards the business environment and the students' community.

In the first instance properly communicating the involvement with business enterprises to the business environment might stimulate other companies to follow the example and test live projects.

Public or institutional commissioners have similar purposes in choosing students instead of professionals as their consultant, although declined within their environment. It is very important for the lecturer, however, to make sure that visibility and involvement with young people and institutions are not the only purposes, i.e. that the brief of the consultancy is not a second level goal for the public body or institutions. This rarely happens with businesses – which are usually mainly interested in solving their problems – but might happen with other kinds of organizations.

1.1. Involving the commissioner and creating a network

The contacts with customers are aimed at understanding in depth the needs of the company. Mutual understanding is best achieved through:

- formal and informal meetings with customers during the start up phase and the realisation of the research programme;
- previous interactions in order to establish a partnership.

The first approach leading to commissioning a live project might be:

1. developed by the potential customers, once they are informed of the possibility;
 2. procured through contacts generated by the university itself (professors and lectures in primis, but also the placement office).
1. Businesses that are already part of the university or the department network, like sponsors or members of the boards, or that have already developed a partnership in research or consultancy projects, area easy to inform of the possibility to work with the students. Having already established a relationship, they might be, to a certain extent, responsive to the opportunity this activity might provide, and therefore, they might contact the professors in order to verify the possibility to develop a specific project.
 2. Businesses who are not directly involved with the university cannot be aware of this opportunity. In this case it could be the university programme responsible or staff who approaches the businesses in order to make a proposal for cooperation.

Both ways the university will have to keep working on networking and external relations.

Ongoing and effective communication channels with its partner companies concerning all categories of information – results of research activities, feedbacks from customers and other stakeholders, including complaints.

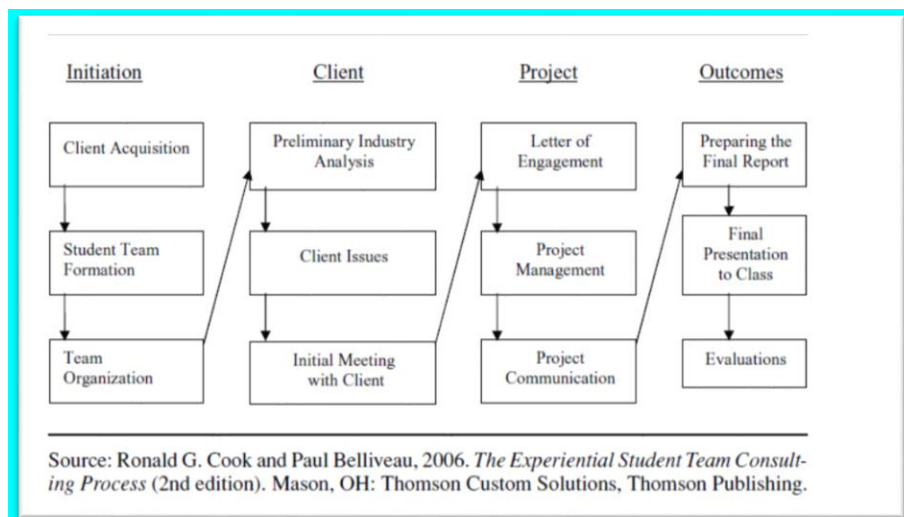


Fig. II.1. A field based consultancy project

In both cases the key issue is to understand in depth the specific features and needs of the company in order to set up cooperation beneficial for all the parties involved: the company, the higher education institution and students.

Mutual understanding is best achieved through the following:

- formal and informal meetings with commissioners during the start-up phase and the realisation of the project;
- previous interactions as highlighted in chapter A.2 in order to establish a partnership;
- keeping in touch with Alumni who work or worked in partner companies or are involved in the business;
- monitoring the results of previous internships experiences through interviews with company representatives and involved students.

Beside ongoing relationships, the first approach might be performed by potential commissioners or procured through contacts generated by lecturers and researchers through both research and training activities.

On the one hand, companies who are already part of the HEIs network or that have already developed a partnership in research or consultancy projects are aware of the possibility to host students as part of their education curriculum and to build on that experience a live project. Therefore, having already established a relationship, they might contact the university in order to verify the possibility to develop a specific project.

On the other hand, companies who are not directly involved with the HEI might not be aware of this opportunity. In this case it could be the lecturers or people in charge of placements, staff who approaches the businesses in order to make a proposal for cooperation.

An initial cooperation on internship indeed might provide the possibility to get to know the university or some department and then extend the relationship to other levels.

Whatever the situation, it is very important to keep in mind that businesses, and especially SMEs, which are the majority, require personal relationships, so the university must adopt an interpersonal approach, not a formal one (Demain, 2001).

To involve businesses, associations, institutions, DMOs, etc., in a live project is never an easy task, especially when the "course" or the implementation of Students' Consultancy is in its first steps. The main issue is time and more specifically the

time that is required to provide information and feedback to the students, which can ultimately become lost, as the students and tutors guiding them and acting as mentors might find themselves within a position where they are unable to provide professional solutions or appropriate analysis. Potentially, because in all other teaching programmes they are undertaking and resolving predetermined academic exercises.

The development of the tripartite relationship (Moulding and Montaguti, 2015) allows for the growth in both the ability of the mentors involved as well as the students themselves. As the projects proceed, the mentors find themselves more actively enjoying and becoming involved in the consultancy process and somehow in the students' struggles to undertake the consultancy brief to its ultimate professional end.

Over a period of time as trust is developed and established, hence the students-lecturer-commissioner relationship develops enabling the business client to view the student consultants as part of their own staff within the industry and involving them within the business on a weekly basis.

This involvement (see also Thomas & Busby, 2003) develops a basis for a strong relationship between students, businesses and lecturers and strengthens the tripartite relationship.

In 2012, at Manchester University as part of the Student Group consultancy unit, a client brief for a leading independent restaurant brand involved a group of students who all derived from different cultural backgrounds, their initial brief was to explore and develop different menu options due to global food

shortages. However, such was their contribution to the overall business strategy that the students transferred their knowledge of other international cuisines such as sugar substitutes and lower fat contents and spent time with the internal chefs discussing the dressing of plates to ensure less fat and carbohydrates. The owner of the business spoke of the student's *initial silence* when they first spent time as a manager within the company but soon *developed confidence* and shared their knowledge which became a valuable asset for the business. Effectively, albeit for a short period the students became a part of the overall management team, which strengthened their confidence for future employability options.

In the words of one of the commissioners of the 2012-13 project of the Ca' Foscari – Ciset Master's programme in the Economics and Management of Tourism – which includes live projects in its courses since 2004, the involvement of students - and the feelings this stimulated in the various people involved in the project - allowed not only to build a good relationship with the university, but also among the various municipalities that joined this project focused on the creation of a tourist bikeway. Private comments focus on the quality of the job. The commissioner of the 2013-14 Master's live project, the financial director of the Italian branch of an international chain, underlined

- *the professional quality* of the local marketing plans the students realised for some of the hotels of the chain;
- *the plans are operative tools, ready to be implemented.*

Having followed the projects since the beginning he also noticed how much the students changed through the live project, improving their technical skills, communication and developing a more and more professional approach. Comments aside, the best feedback is the fact that past experience from programmes that adopted live projects years ago show that the projects are implemented by the commissioner: the marketing plans mentioned above became operative just after the discussion, and the bikeway project lead to an agreement among the municipality for the realisation of the various activities indicated by the students - the logo and name proposed by the students were adopted and the municipalities found the money to finance the new itinerary website.



Fig. II.2. – Tag cloud of the commisioners' feedback on their live project experiences (Moulding & Montaguti, 2015).

More importantly is the development of the tripartite relationship between businesses and universities - after the first consultancy the commissioners tend to ask for a repeat of the experience the following year, to have interns in their staff, or to have access to the alumni curricula. In other cases, all business clients to date have continued to be partners with the unit and have offered further opportunities for student's or act as consultants within their businesses. Hence, the unexpected standards of the students' performance, the continuous contact with the students and some emotional involvement has consequently built closer business-university cooperation.

1.2. Typologies of commissioners

Since experiential learning can take place in different kind of real-life projects it results in that many different organisations and companies can provide the students with a commission. Commissioners could come from the public sector, from the private sector or they could come from what is referred to as the third sector.

Public sector

Public sector comprises different kind of organisations and all publicly controlled or publicly funded agencies, enterprises, and other entities that deliver public programs, goods or services. Public sector organisations can work at an international, national, regional or local level (IA, 2011). The public sector

sponsors for instance development organisations and educational institutions which could provide students with interesting commissions.

Development agencies aiming at improved industrial competitiveness, innovation and internationalization of the economy exist in many countries both at national, regional and local level. These organisations can also raise funding from the private sector for certain projects, but the permanent funding come generally from the government (OECD, 2009). The same applies to destination marketing/ management organisations working for promoting tourism and improving the attractiveness of the destination (Pike, 2008).

Educational institutions in Europe are usually sponsored by the public sector. Educational institutions can be defined as entities that provide instructional services to individuals or education-related services to individuals and other educational institutions (OECD, 2001). Educational institutions are for instance elementary schools, junior and upper secondary high schools, vocational schools, colleges and different kind of universities. Projects that could be done for commissioners from this field

are for instance events, trips, marketing and different kind of research projects.

Among the educational institutions universities have been giving a special task, to conduct research. Research and development (R&D) is a systematic activity combining both basic and applied research, and aimed at discovering solutions to problems or creating new goods and knowledge (Businessdictionary, 2018). Students can support the research and development projects in different ways but typically they help with data collection, data analysis and dissemination. Students at master level can also be part of the R&D team of a project and thereby also be involved in managing the whole project and development of data collection tools.

E.g., Haaga-Helia UAS has successfully integrated groups of students in the EU financed projects like *Tourist* (<https://www.fh-joanneum.at/en/projekt/tourist-competence-centres-for-the-development-of-sustainable-tourism-and-innovative-financial-management-strategies/>) and *Growmat* (<https://growmat.eu/>). The role of the students is to support the researchers and lecturers in the project with collection and analysing of data and thereby contribute to deepen the knowledge and innovating solutions related to the issues central for the project.

Private sector

The private sector comprises companies of different size; traditionally companies have been divided into micro, small, medium and large. Currently there is also a lot of discussions of the importance of start-ups for economic growth, thus also start-ups will shortly be discussed.

According to the definition of different companies by European Union, a micro company has less than 10 employees and a turnover less than 2 million. Small business is defined by the EU as a company with less than 50 employees and a turnover less than 10 million. Medium sized companies can have up to 250 employees and a turnover of 50 million. In Europe 9 out of 10 enterprises are SMEs and they generate 2 out of 3 jobs (EU, 2018). Micro and small companies often lack human and financial resources for innovation activities, internationalisation and change management. Small business organizational charts are often flat, the communication informal and decision-making in the hand of one to two persons (Ingram, 2018).

Start-ups are companies working to solve a problem where the solution is not obvious and success is not guaranteed (Forbes, 2013). Start-ups can be seen as “*temporary organization designed to search for a repeatable and scalable business model*” (Entrepreneursinsight, 2018). It is not always easy to understand the difference between a SME and a start-up

company, the main difference being that SMEs are permanent organizations in rather traditional markets, whereas start-ups normally are very innovative and focusing on fast growth even at a huge risk. Figure II.2 highlights the differences.

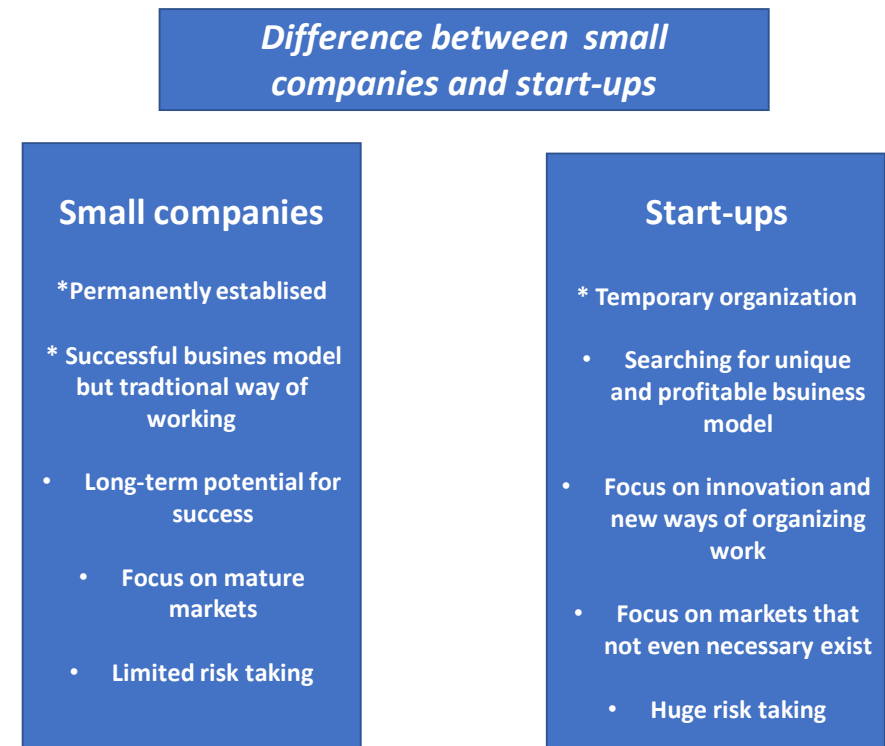


Fig.II.3. Difference between small companies and start-ups (modified from Entrepreneursinsight, 2018)

Large companies employ more than 250 people and there are no limits on how big the turnover can be (EU, 2018). Large companies doing business in several countries are called

multinational companies. In a large company, the business processes are complex and well established. There are many layers of bureaucracy, and because of this, nothing happens quickly (Ingram, 2018).

Haaga-Helia UAS is, for instance, working with companies of any size in the real-life projects. Sometimes commissioners have been big companies like *Finnair* and *Clarion hotel chain* but students have also successfully worked also with start-ups like *Duara Travel* (<https://www.duaratravels.com/>) and *TinyApp* (<https://tinyapp.biz/?lang=en>).

The third sector

The third sector can be divided into non-governmental organisations and non-profit-organisations. A non-governmental organization (NGO) can be organized on a local, national or international level. *The funding of the NGO comes mostly from the government(s)*. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bring citizen concerns to Governments, advocate and monitor policies and encourage political participation through provision of information. Some are organized around specific issues, such as human rights, environment or health. These organizations also offer analysis

and expertise, serve as early warning mechanisms and help monitor and implement international agreements (NGO, 2018; Global Issues, 2005). Well-known NGOs are for instance *Amnesty*, *Greenpeace* and *Red Cross* but smaller and less known NGOs exist in most countries.

Non-profit organisations usually get funding both from the public and the private sector as well as from private persons. The funds are not divided between its shareholders, or owners, but used for the organization's purposes such as charity or running of museums or soup kitchens (Tury, 2018). Examples of these organizations are public arts organizations, trade unions and charitable organizations. Non-profit organizations might hire management personnel, and aim to raise substantial funds, but these funds are used for common good (Difference Between.net, 2018).

The third sector comprises also smaller non-profit organizations such as sport clubs, local and regional event organizers, music artists and theatres, as well as hobby organizations such as the scouts as long as these are run by people working on a volunteering basis. Students at Haaga-Helia UAS Porvoo campus have, for instance, worked with third sector's commissions such as planning social media activities for the

Finnish Olympic Committee and improving the brand of *Finnish Rheumatism Association*.

http://fdslive.oup.com/www.oup.com/academic/pdf/13/9780199236152_chapter1.pdf

The commissioner can be any of the actors presented in section 1.1. Generally, small companies and start-ups are more in need of help with development of processes but any kind of organisation with a real need for getting some work done can be good commissioners. Commissioners can be found through multiple channels. Sometimes companies have heard or read about previous projects conducted by students and contact the university directly asking for help. Most universities also have a partnership program with companies who are supporting the university in different ways. If the partnership program is run efficiently, the university is contacting their partner regularly and invites them to different events.

These official partners of the HEI normally have a genuine interest in co-operating with the university in different ways and are thus often good commissioners. University alumni can also be good contact persons if any interesting commissions are given by companies directly asking for help. Finally, the social media channel for professionals, LinkedIn, could be good

channels for identifying possible companies to participate with. An example of this is provided in Fig.II.4.

Dear contacts

We are once again looking for partners Interested in project co-operation with International Sales and Marketing students of Haaga-Helia Porvoo Campus.

Next autumn's projects will be focusing on the following:

Gathering customer understanding using different methods and making use of it to generate more sales. The students are encouraged to take actual customer contacts using the channels that are best suited for interacting with the specific customers: phone calls/ social media/ e-mail/ face 2 face-meetings or other.

An international aspect and interest in entering new markets is desirable. The projects run during the whole semester from August to December.

What will the companies get from the project?

- one or more international student teams working to find a solution to the problem presented to them
- new insights and application of recent theoretical frameworks and research results in the field of sales and marketing
- outsiders' perspectives on the company's business
- opportunity to recruit students for internships, thesis projects or longer periods

Please contact if your organization or someone else you know would appreciate a little help around these issues and would like to contribute to development of students at the same time!

31 Likes · 11 Comments

Fig. II.4. Example of how commissions can be looked for in LinkedIn

1.3. Choosing the commissioner and the brief

Some issues to consider when the commissioner is chosen are that

- the commission is a real project not one specifically created for the purpose;
- the content and learning objectives of the course, the real need for a problem to be solved at the commissioning organisation;
- the resources the commissioner has for co-operating with the students;
- the fact that the commissioner really trusts competences of the students.

The first issue to consider when choosing a commissioner is that the project is a real project, and the development needs are identified in the organisation giving the commission. It could sometimes be tempting to create a project with some personal contact at an organisation just for learning. Students will though quickly realise whether the organisations really need help from them or not.

Secondly, even if the primary reason for implementing experiential learning is to develop the transversal skills of the students, the modules where experiential learning is implemented usually also have other learning objectives than meta competences such as project management, time management and team working skills. Thus, if the key learning of the semester is sales in B2B it is important that the project is

related to that. As experiential learning does not exclude learning theory, it will be confusing for the students if the theory linked to the semester or the course is not supporting the practical work in the project.

Thirdly, it is important to discuss what kind of resources the possible commissioner has for supporting the students with the project. It is important that the commissioner at least takes the time to meet up with the students 2-3 times during the semester, to present the project, in the middle of the process and in the end when results are presented. Moreover, the commissioner should preferably take the time to communicate with the students by e-mail or Skype. Thus, it is important that the commissioner commits himself to the co-operation otherwise there is a risk that the students loose motivation during the phases when they need answers to certain questions from the company giving the commission. If the commission requires students to travel for data collection, such as interviewing, the commissioner should also be prepared to put in some financial resource to the project.

Finally, good commissioners trust the students and believe that they can support the commissioning organisation. If students are trusted they will be given all information and data needed for proceeding the projects such as budgets, pricing strategies

and data related sales. Working with students in experiential learning projects should preferably not be seen as a part of the corporate social responsibility work but rather as serious co-operation that result in that both students and the organisation learn and develop process together.

The brief

A brief is an overview of the commissioning describing what should be done in the project. It might be difficult for the company to provide the brief without help from the lecturers involved in the project since universities tend to have their own vocabulary when they give instructions to the students. Thus, the brief is usually written by the lecturers together with the representatives from the commissioning organisation. It is important that very clear guidelines are given, especially, if the project is given to the first or the second year students. If the students get a written brief they can go back to it over and over again during the process. It is often not enough to give guidelines only orally, since even if students make notes they will make their own notes there is a risk that they do not really get all information needed.

1.4. Controlling the scope and tuning the brief

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, it is usually the lecturer who, on the basis of the inputs provided by the business, defines a draft proposal for the brief.

The definition of the proposal is, in this instance, particularly relevant.

The lecturer must have a clear idea, since the beginning of the process, of the educational aims for the students as well as the results for the business.

The proposal must include a timeline compatible with the course so that the students are able to follow all the steps of the research from data gathering to the delivery of the results.

Therefore the proposal will have to take into account:

- business goals in commissioning the research
 - o tackling specific internal issues
 - o gaining more in depth knowledge of the sector and competitive environment
 - o co-marketing to increase visibility through the presentation of the results
- relevance to the students
 - o learning contents and methodology
 - o team work
 - o new tools and information
 - o data compatible and accessible according to the learning stage of the class
 - o newness
 - o relevance for their future jobs
- tools and information required to fulfil the research

- available data
- available internal business data
- needs for surveys and interviews
- support staff availability (tutors, other lecturers)
- timing and deadlines
 - compatible with class activities and specific courses, and their ending.

This last issue might result particularly tricky – different *experiences in Italy highlight that one of the most difficult* things to explain to a business might be that the students are not available after a given date.

However, this can also be used to an advantage as has been the case in England in 2018 whereby a student consultancy group was offered a contract for private consultancy after the unit had been completed. This acted as a tremendous motivating factor for the students who found themselves in such a privileged position to embark upon a piece of private consultancy at an early career age.

Although, they should be aware of deadlines and time management, businesses tend not recall that the teaching activities have their own deadlines and calendars. The timing and the GANTT should be made very clear to the commissioner, providing it within the brief and underlining it several times during the meetings.

It is advisable to have a start up meeting in order to better understand the company needs and define the project. In fact the formulation of a proposal sprouts from a close interaction

with the company that involves a negotiation of the contents and the tools required and the information that should be provided by the company.

During the above mentioned process it might occur that:

- the contents of the project are not suitable to the educational requirement of the class;
- the company goals are not compatible with a non professional team that might not have acquired yet the proper background to tackle the issues involved;
- the timelines do not match;
- the results requested do not match the budget.

It is not necessary for the proposal addressed to the company to include the educational content of the project, unless specifically requested by the commissioner.

The training content must anyway be well identified by the lecturer and should be included in another document addressed to the students who will take part in the project development.

All basic requirements and information concerning the implementation of the project are defined in the agreement document during the negotiation stage.

The above mentioned document is drawn up by the lecturer.

Variations might be required throughout the project development. They could be proposed by the lecturer or by the commissioner and be targeted at:

- the content of the project

- the timeline of the project
- the final results the company needs to achieve.

Each variation to the project is identified and examined by the same parties involved in the project definition and planning, and must be approved.

Variations in progress to the original project must be thoroughly assessed as they might have a negative impact on the learning process of the class.

The variations might be proposed by the students themselves, by the business, or by the lecturer. In any case, the group of students involved has to be always informed and need to agree on the variations.

Taking into account that live projects are developed by the class for free on behalf of a company, no additional costs could be associated to the variation, on the other hand substantial change might undermine the ultimate educational goals. It is, therefore, important that the business is made aware of the impacts of its requests for in progress changes.

1.5. What can a class or a students' team achieve?

1.5.1. The essential role of an aware commissioner

In planning the live project and defining the brief, the first step is always to define its educational objectives, which are roughly (for more detail see PART III):

- to acquire the tools needed to perform applied research in a real scenario;
- to test methodologies on real cases;
- to provide results within a given timeframe;
- to work independently;
- to deal with problem solving, decision making;
- to learn how to provide results and solutions based on data analysis;
- to perform team work and team leading through task organisation;
- to improve communication and presentation skills – oral and written.

These learning goals have to stay at the centre of the project and must be always kept in mind in defining the brief and have to be underlined – the experience say “more than once” – to the commissioner, and included in the written brief to be agreed upon. Before giving the details upon the brief it is advisable to add a part explaining

- what a live project is;
- which are the learning goals;
- what is expected from the commissioners.

This is important because, although the students can perform in a way unexpected even to themselves, they still have a right to get things wrong in the process, or not to achieve fully the results.



Fig. II.5. – A group of Italian students discussing with their commissioner

Therefore, it is essential for the commissioner to understand that this is an educational activity and that he/she is supposed to be part of it, and not to expect the results exactly as in a professional environment. Otherwise, the risk is that the commissioner understands the live project as a purely commissioned activity with certified results, with two main consequences:

- the commissioner is driven to use the students' team as its own team, trying to manoeuvre objectives and activities towards the results he is looking for, careless of their education;

- to meet the commissioner needs, professors and tutors might be forced to get involved directly in the students' work, becoming team leaders and basically telling the students what they have to do.

Both these conditions hamper profoundly the students' learning process and competencies acquirement. Therefore, while the brief can be achieved all the same in those conditions – or even better possibly – the learning goals are not met.

1.5.2. How big a challenge can the students face?

If the commissioner is aware of the learning environment he/she is involved in, the main worry of the teacher is that the students are able to achieve the brief.

One of the main things to be underlined is that students usually have the ability and drive to obtain results greater than the teacher, the commissioner and the students themselves expect.

One of the essential features to lead a live project is to trust the students, which might imply a major change of perspective for some teachers.

That said, a live project, especially a challenging one, can imply high levels of stress for the students that need to be managed. In Chapter 2 there is a specific paragraph about this.

Here the authors' experience is used to help identifying the features or requirements within a brief that can result into the highest level of challenge for the students, which are, by level

1. briefs asking for creativity/innovation, e.g., finding entirely new solutions, new products for the market, commercial formulas unheard of, etc.;
2. briefs asking for intense levels of critical thinking, especially if this implies to overcome well set mechanism of problem-solution – the students are used to situations where the lecturer sets the problem and shows the student how to solve it and then asks the student to solve similar problems (Case, 2005);
3. briefs that are not enough focussed, or which the achievement of entails taking into consideration and changing too many aspects or sectors of the business, or of the territory;
4. in contexts where the students come all from the same background, briefs entailing the need for an interdisciplinary approach might result challenging.

As for analytical skills they might create difficulties themselves but are not usually where the risk of not performing is higher.

That critical and creative thinking is more challenging as is linked to the fact that they are not so much addressed and used during school years or university study, despite the role they seem to have in the various curriculum (Case, 2005; Pithers & Soden, 2000). – cfr Part I.

Of course, developing this kind of thinking – and linking it to a content – is precisely the goal of using live projects, but the lecturer must be aware that the risk of failure enhances in relation to them, especially in front of very demanding commissioners, and be very careful in assessing the class he

has in front of him/her before accepting a commission that might entail too high risk.

1.6. The commissioner as a lecturer

The person in charge of the project for the commissioner – or a wider team of persons – tends to be inevitably involved as well in the students' training. This is an important feature of live projects. As also discussed in Part III there are commissioners who might interpret the live project as a professional consulting all in all and would kind of stand apart once the brief is given and wait for the result. That kind of behaviour, however, usually leads to a higher difficulty in exploiting the experiential learning approach – as an uninvolved commissioner might not understand the time and trial-error required by the students' learning, or the initial ignorance of certain aspects. Furthermore, it hampers for the students the possibility to learn from the commissioner and his/her team. It also reduces the possibility for the students to learn how to conduct the relationship with a senior or a commissioner themselves, how to take part into a business meeting, etc.

In addition to that, it makes harder for the teacher and the tutor coordinating the work, as this kind of commissioner usually takes them as the only point of reference.

For all those reasons, it is important to choose the commissioner (if there is a possibility of choice) also

considering these aspects, and to beware that initially the teacher might need to train the commissioner, too.

Inevitably, there will be commissioners, or members of their team, who have a sort of vocation to teach, and others who are not very good at this.

The essential element is to guarantee that, whatever the situation, they understand they are part of a learning environment.

To do this, some basic guidelines for the lecturers are:

- when getting in touch and “negotiating” for the brief, underline constantly and try to lead the commissioner too in approaching and adapting the brief to a learning situation;
- before the brief is first introduced to the class and the commissioner starts interacting with the students, recall how the experience is built and provide some basic tips:
 - the students will need time, and they have to be allowed to find the way through and achieve the brief in their own way;
 - providing the solutions the client is considering or a too defined point of view on the brief is not what the students need at this stage;
 - provide feedback on what the students think or on the research plan they devised but do not tell them what to do, or do not organize work in their place;
 - problematise the questions (when appropriate) providing different points of view, doubts, etc.;

- be patient in explaining things that might sound obvious – in this context it may be useful to explain to the commissioner that students tend to not see immediately that some tools, concepts or definitions are the same they studied or an application of it as they tend to live theory and practice as two separate domains;

- before the first feedback on the students work is usually advisable to remind the commissioner that the first part of the work – understanding the brief and what it entails and devising the research plan – takes the students a longer time than it would need for the teacher, a professional consultant, or themselves;
- always ask and discuss with the commissioner the meetings they have with the students;
- remind periodically – e.g., by asking if he finds the students have progressed and learned more about his business – that a live project is a learning project;
- when the commissioner underlines a problem or something it deems necessary but can’t find in the students work, support him/her in guiding the students to it.

Generally, the lecturer needs to be aware that they need to train the commissioner to be a lecturer and a tutor, and, on the other side, that they will have to learn themselves as much as possible from the commissioner in order to guide the students through the brief.

The commissioner who, during the way, finds a sort of vocation in teaching and training is an extra-ordinary resource: the experience teaches in this case to supervise his/her activity but to give room to this kind of commissioner, as the students highly benefit from this. It is important, however, to guide and supervise the following aspects:

- the focus – with no experience and much enthusiasm the risk is that the commissioner/trainer changes or shifts the learning goals;
- harmonisation and coordination – usually the commissioning business representatives are the owners themselves, or managers: given their role, they might overstep their role and ask the students or lead them towards directions without agreeing those changes with the lecturer/tutor.

Recapping, although a commissioner with a lecturer vocation is an important resource, they have to be managed and made aware of the “new” role he/she is playing and what it implies.

These examples further highlight the elements of the Tripartite relationship (Moulding & Montaguti, 2015), whereby the roles of all three participants become entwined and interchanged during a Students’ Consultancy brief.

1.7. The commissioner as a team member and a team leader

As much as a lecturer, the commissioner can be a member or the leader of the students’ team, and work with them, or guide them.

The second situation, unless the commissioner is well known to the lecturer, and well trained and experienced in leading live projects is to be avoided, for the same reasons that lead to be careful in managing the commissioner as a lecturer – even worse if the commissioner acts as a team leader they are surely taking charge of organising and distributing tasks, setting deadlines, making decisions on what it is necessary to do or not. In this case, the commissioner is not using the students as a consultants’ team, but as his/her own internal team. Although, it might be a useful experience for the students, the “own team” attitude risks defeating the purpose of Students’ Consultancy. It has to be recalled that one of the chances live projects offer to the students is to act and be able to discuss with the business owners or managers as equals. This is only possible if they are regarded as consultants – and in the career of the student this will happen again only some years later. If the commissioner positions himself as a team leader – there won’t be any of the peer to peer discussion, and the students might even feel inhibited in expressing their opinions or even their results and solutions if they are afraid the commissioner/leader would not agree.

As a result, the development of skills risks to be hampered. Furthermore, it has to be recalled that usually the students have a placement period to experience being part of a business and a team as an “intern”, and as an employee who will take directions, while the point with live projects is learning to make their way without directions.

For all of those reasons, it is very important that the lecturer and the tutor monitor the interaction between the students and the commissioner to pick early warnings of “own - team attitude”, and stop it from degenerating. This is usually made acting both on the commissioner and the students: the first one needs to be remained to “let the students lead and fail”, while the second ones feel much reassured to disagree, follow their path or propose their own views if the lecturer confirms they can and have to. Of course, that doesn’t mean the lecturer needs to foster a sort of rebellious attitude (it would be counterproductive to go against the commissioners experience and knowledge of their business and market), but to encourage the students to explore their own point of view or the possibilities they see as much as the commissioners, and to collect the evidence they need to prove their point and make the commissioners change their mind.

1.8. Working with the commissioner

As the previous paragraphs show, for the Students’ Consultancy to work at its best, the commissioner needs to be “part of the game”, not an external ghostly entity.

In any case, it is essential that the students perceive the importance of their work, or motivation will quickly die down, and cooperation and interaction are the only ways to ensure the students the work they are doing is worth something for the business.

Being part of the game and the collaborative partnership means that the commissioner needs to work as well, with the students, and with the lecturer.

The level of commitment required – which is in the end not that much – needs to be underlined from the beginning to the commissioner by the lecturer. This commitment is usually substantiated by:

- willingness to meet the students, in person or at a distance, at least 4 times, and to answer their e-mails providing the internal data required;
- supporting, if needed, the students in their primary research (allowing access to premises, to clients, smoothing the way with suppliers and partners, etc.);
- reading the materials the students provide and giving feedback.

With the commissioner as active part of the game, one of the more important features of live projects is ensured, i.e.

- the students learn both from the lecturer and the commissioner;
- the lecturer learns both from the students (specific features and aspect of the business and its market, concepts coming from other disciplines, different tools,

etc.) and the commissioner (local market situation, insight in the organization and the market, managerial style, organization, etc.);

- the commissioner learns both from the students (new or fresh point of view and concepts, different tools and approaches, information on their market, etc.) and the lecturer (how to be a teacher, interacting with juniors, directly or indirectly, different managerial tools, approaches, other disciplines concepts and tools, etc.).

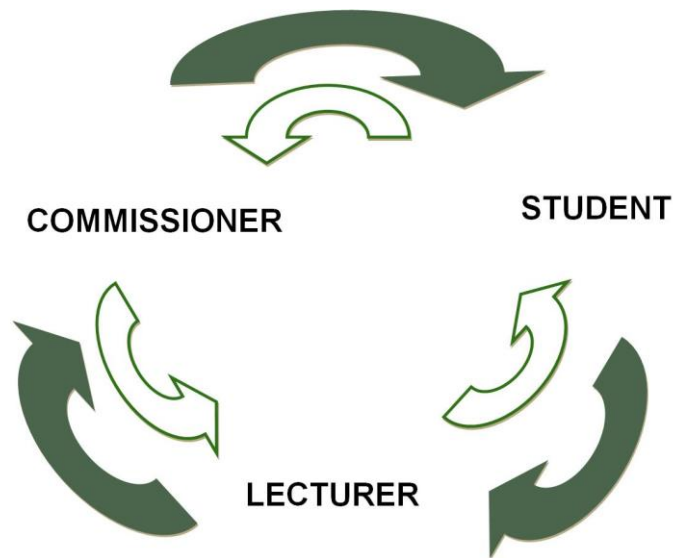


Fig. II. 6. The double learning flow

This mutual learning can happen directly or indirectly through one of the other parties, and it basically enables all the three partners to be simultaneously teachers and learners.

In this way, it defines a tripartite relationship, and creating the basis for a virtuous circle of business-university cooperation (Moulding & Montaguti, 2015).

1.8.2. The tripartite relationship

What has been underlined in the previous paragraphs aims at exploiting the full potential of Students' Consultancy as a form of active/experiential learning activity that can support the development of strong cooperation between industry and higher education institutions, including both teachers, lecturers and students.

This new form of collaborative working partnership – the 'Tripartite relationship' (Moulding & Montaguti, 2015) enhances not only the connections between the student, the university and the business client within a triangular relationship but included within each stage added, mutual benefits in order that each party had something additionally to benefit from. For example, the relationship between the business client and the university would include if necessary the attachment of external stakeholders, e.g., trade associations, tourist boards who would assist in endorsing and promoting the collaborative work carried out within the business by the students.

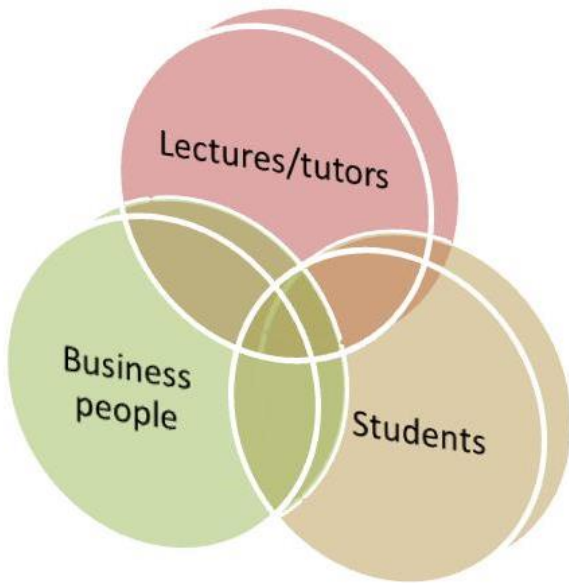


Fig. II. 7. The tripartite relationship

This sense of endorsement particularly during international transfers provided the Students' Consultancy scheme with a sense of prestige and priority within the associated industry itself.

Additionally, the relationship with the business client and the lecturer recognises and appreciates the level of professionalism and strategic issues and marketing skills provided by the lecturer rather than a purely academic, inwardly facing role.

Furthermore, the relationship between the business client and the student is developed in order to allow the student further expose within the business itself. This takes the format of, for example, attendance at staff meetings and training days,

working with the head chef on new food substitutes, becoming involved within the implementation stage of the solution to the brief that they had undertaken and achieved. In effect, this approach within the relationship enables also a closer, more emotional bond with the students and the business in which they could be seen as part of the business and its brand, etc.

1.8.3. The virtuous circle

In the short term, the tripartite relationship works because the three parties involved need to cooperate, but the live project doesn't create a link between academics and business only, but also a direct link between students and managers, which facilitates employment opportunities. In the medium term, therefore, the link can be enhanced thanks to the students' employment in the same companies. As the students' comments highlight, the live project experience is an involving one, and therefore it also strengthens the link between students and university, encouraging the students to maintain their connection with the institutions and to involve the company they work for in other live projects.

While enhancing the academy-business cooperation, live projects benefit the students by helping them to develop transferrable competencies they need on the job, and enhancing their employability.

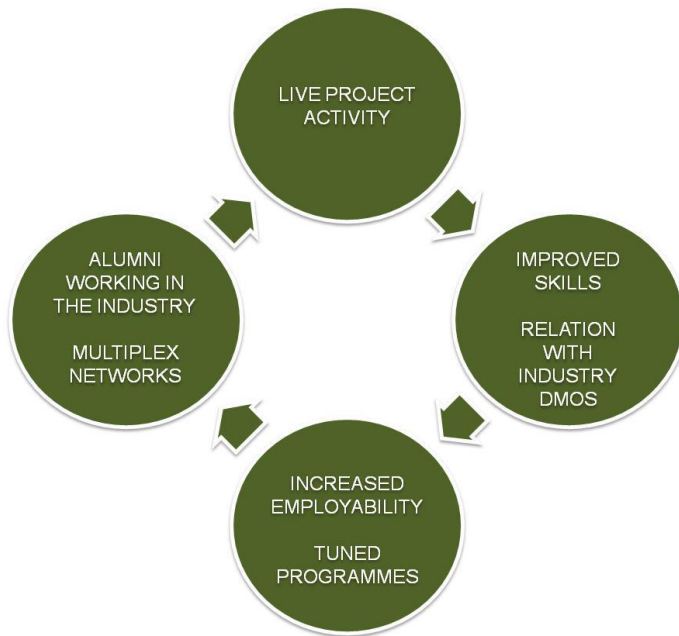


Fig. II. 8. The virtuous circle

The university, in this way, gains insight not only in the latest evolution of the market and of the business models, but also on the needs the business expresses in terms of competencies of the employees, thus having the possibility to tune its courses and increase the employment chances of all the students.

1.9. The commissioner assessment

In all the live projects experiences that constitute the basis for this guidebook – the commissioner's evaluation of the students work and results is taken into full consideration:

- the commissioner is asked for his/her assessment and this assessment is incorporated into the final mark given by the lecturer/s;
- the commissioner is asked to mark the students' team and its mark is then combined with the lecturer/s' one to obtain the final mark.

It is also needed for the commissioner to explain and justify his/her assessment. It might be useful to ask for three different assessments:

- achievement of the brief and report;
- final discussion – level of professionalism achieved;
- how the students handled their relationship with him/her.

If the commissioner doesn't feel being able to give a mark, the lecturer can easily use the three assessments to mark the team.

Another important aspect to ask the commissioner, especially if they had a close relationship with the team, is their opinion of each member. This is essential if the lecturer or tutor is not able to be present at every single meeting or interaction with the commissioner.

2. The students

Kolb (1981) states that in order for experiential learning to be a highly effective educational method, it must engage the student at a personal level by addressing the needs and wants of the individual hence requiring self-initiative and self-evaluation. For experiential learning to be truly effective, the process of learning

should allow for new skills, new attitudes or even entirely new ways of thinking. It is vital therefore that the students are directly involved in the experience, in order that they gain a better understanding of the new knowledge and retain the information for a longer time (Kolb, 1981).

The students who took part in live project-consultancy experiences the authors are in charge of, highlight clearly this kind of involvement in their feedback. A number of themes reoccur: "involving", "personal development", and "demanding", "stressful", "rewarding", "challenging", "a journey of personal growth". What is the most impressive within this feedback is that it shows mainly emotional and personal aspects (see also fig. II.9). In fact, in 2018, in the students' own words, the consultancy experience has been described as "a powerful personal experience".

Further feedback, from another student, highlights live projects as a complex and stressful learning experience, and a difficult experience but a very rewarding one, underlining how it exposed some features of her character. Other students have recalled their consultancy experience as one in which to begin with they felt was outside of their intellectual and professional capabilities, however, through the support of her unit leader and lecturer found themselves becoming part of a rewarding, surprising and challenging experience with her business client. This later became the basis for a key part within a CV and future employability preferences.

This level of involvement, and challenge, however, requires a specific attention to the learners and their emotions and fears,

and to the learning environment. This chapter focuses precisely on how to manage the relationship with the students during a live project experience.

2.1. 360° learning

Teaching environments in higher education institutions have not changed that much during the last 800 years. The traditional classroom setting has remained more or less after the foundation of the first universities in Europe. The learning took place only in the classrooms where teachers lectured to students. Exams controlled learning. The idea of learning somewhere else than under the control of teachers and the university walls was not accepted. This was the ideal until recently. Of course, in sciences learning could also take place in laboratories where they would be introduced.

Classrooms as the only learning places with the control of teachers and university walls are still there. Still, a lot of teachers and administrators believe that higher levels of learning need structures that have been there for some time. Earlier, teachers had the knowledge and with it the power, but today the knowledge is everywhere, and the question is how to find it, what is important and how to implement it. With the more direct access to knowledge, learning in fact takes place more and more somewhere else other than inside classrooms of higher education institutions.

According to, e.g., Claremont (2018), previous studies show that students remember only 5% from traditional lectures, 50% when used discussions, 70% when doing practical exercises,

and 80% in peer-to-peer teaching. This should mean that there is a huge need of collaborative and immersive learning and learning environments to enhance it. Learning is and should be more engaging, inspiring, collaborative, immersive and experiential. There are, though two prerequisites for that: new pedagogies and learning environments. New pedagogies enhance also the change of traditional teachers' roles from knowledge feeders to mentors, coaches, facilitators, conductors, etc.

360-degree learning is based on the same concept as when assessing e.g. directors, managers and supervisors and their abilities to lead a team of people. The perspectives are various. When using the concept in learning, the emphasis is on the fact that our environment and experiences have an impact on our learning. It surrounds environments where students are and work. E. g., on campuses, students learn something in classrooms or lecture halls, but more in libraries and cafes, especially, when working together. When understanding this, a much wider toolbox of pedagogical methods can be used to enhance learning and help students to reach the competences and other aims/goals of their training.

Another, perhaps a more contemporary concept that could cover 360-degree learning is ubiquitous learning. It means that learning can take place anywhere and anytime, thus it is often linked to information and communication technologies like mobile technologies (Education, 2025, 2018). Cope and Kalantzis (2010) go on to state that "Ubiquitous learning is a new educational paradigm made possible in part by the

affordances of digital media". IGI Global (2018) lists describe characteristics of ubiquitous learning: It is wireless. The learning can take place anytime and anywhere, learning is just-on-time, it uses capabilities of wireless and mobile technologies, and learning can be accessed from a variety of environments and contexts. Education, 2025 (2018) tries to give a clearer picture of the ubiquitous learning by emphasising some aspects of it. To put it shortly, the aspects are spatial ubiquity where there is constant access to the Internet. Practical ubiquity means the changing or blurring lines of producer and user of available information and why it was originally created there. Temporal ubiquity gives learners the option to reach knowledge whenever it suits them, also inside the concept of life-long-learning that could be changed to continuous learning. Other aspects are mobile devices, interconnectedness and globalised transnational networks. Cope and Kalantzis (2010) go on that ubiquitous learning can mix the traditional boundaries in education, especially institutional, spatial and temporal boundaries. Ubiquitous learning also allows using different learners as a resource in knowledge creation. Furthermore, the knowledge supplier can be whoever, it is not anymore that controlled. This can be interpreted that knowledge can be build together, collaboratively, thus ubiquitous learning enhances the birth of knowledge cultures.

2.2. The power of emotions

Cognitive neurosciences have argued that the more that 'emotion' is involved the more that the human brain retains the knowledge and memory linked to that emotion (Reisberg &

In all these listed approaches the responsibility of learning is by the student him or herself. The responsibility of learning can be something different to new students, rookies in the academic world. In their studying history, the traditional high school setting emphasised teacher-led learning, learning from lectures and books, and preparation to, perhaps national exams. This framework can't give students tools to face methods that emphasise own initiative and collaboration in knowledge creation with peers, teachers and perhaps industry representatives as commissioners of projects.

As the stage of experiential learning might sound challenging for students coming from traditional high schools, the role of teachers become very important when trying to present new pedagogical methods and tools to enhance learning and reach competences that are often very different to those emphasised in the previous educational institutions. In traditional high schools the needed knowledge is decided by teachers, books and national exams, thus the role of students remains rather passive in other aspects than a reader and performer. It is easy to read, learn by heart and make some minor presentations in front of a classroom with other students known already for some years. But in experiential learning the setup is different. There are agreed competences, aims and goals to be reached, but the way to do all this differs a lot from students' previous experiences. Forms of reaching aims and goals (and in the end competences) is very different and often with no settled way of working.

As high schools aim to do as well as possible in the national exams, it is always easier to work in a traditional way. At least, it should guarantee some results. But in experiential learning, the more general competences, aims and goals might remain the same as describes in e.g. curriculum and module/course descriptions, ways to reach them vary. This is one of the challenges to students as well as many teachers. Ways of working change semester by semester, or project by project, or problem by problem. The only continuity is the change and new tools and ways to reach the given objectives. The objectives in experiential learning are more abstract than in traditional high schools. Sometimes it is difficult even for teachers to interpret them to students and themselves.

The fear of failing is what we all face often or at least occasionally. The starting point is very often that failing is not allowed, it is for losers. And the fear of jumping into something new is most often only the fear of failing. Fear of failing is very culture-oriented, and in general not very accepted. This should be the focus on experiential learning, fail, but learn from it. There are also other fears in experiential learning than the fear of failing. The fear of taking responsibilities, fear of co-operating with other people, fear of missing rules and structures, fear of new roles of students and teachers, fear of communicating, fear of everything that is new in the framework of learning. But students are not alone with their fears. Teachers face similar fears, and their emphasis is more in the changing role of teachers. Teachers don't have any longer correct answers to given questions – how to cope with it?

To manage or lead the fear and failure is simply to change the roles of the stakeholders in the process. The outcome has its importance as well as the process, but the focus should be on learning and in experiential learning all the stakeholders are learners. It is good to remember failures enhance learning as well. Other tools to prevent fear are some structures for learning like schedule, learning outcomes, project aims and goals, properly expressed process descriptions, clear roles of people learning in the projects and plan B and perhaps also plan C.

Openness and accepting atmosphere help people to take it easier and do not worry that much about possible failures. The role of teachers as coaches is important because their role is to encourage students in the project and its process. If there is a failure in vision, coaches don't say it clearly, but try to get students to understand it by themselves. It is important to point out to students that there is always someone they can turn to when needed. Students shouldn't feel that they would be left alone.

2.4. Managing chaos and creation

As the background of an average student is in a traditional high school with very structured ways of working and traditional pedagogy, chaos and creation that are part of experiential learning might be a slight shock for them. Even though, there are project plan, process description, course, module and semester description as well as a clear commission from e.g. an organisation, the work and learning don't always proceed as expected. In the beginning of university studies when new ways

or working and learning are different from the past, students can get frustrated when the process doesn't proceed as expected. It might start to feel like living in chaos where no one has understanding nor responsibility of how to go on. In this situation, it is good to remember that chaos can enhance creation and creativity.

To manage chaos and creation needs more or less the same tools than to manage fear and failure. It is easier to manage chaos when there is a hidden structure behind the learning process. The structure includes elements like course and module descriptions, list of competences to be reached, semester aims, commission aims, etc. It is easy to forget the given elements in a chaotic situation, but in the end, they are there to guarantee the wanted learning and commission outcome. It is also good to remember that chaos is rather transmitting. When one team of students think they have lost the point and don't know what to do next, it easily transmits to the next team. The structural elements are not always enough, because it is easy to forget them. Who would check e.g. expected competences or course description in the middle of the process when there are fires to extinguish.

A chaotic situation can be solved with a coaching and mentoring role and approach of teachers in the project/semester. They are there to help students to reach the aims and competences as well as enhancing learning. In experiential learning, we can talk about just-on-time learning, but not just-on-time coaching or assisting. Teachers are not allowed to give students direct orders or guidelines how to

proceed or what to do and show the direction where to go. Both teachers and students have their roles in the process, they are all learners, but from perhaps different perspectives. It is good to name here that especially when students learn through real life, commissioned projects, they have also various roles there. To manage chaos, it is important to choose suitable people to different tasks in the project.

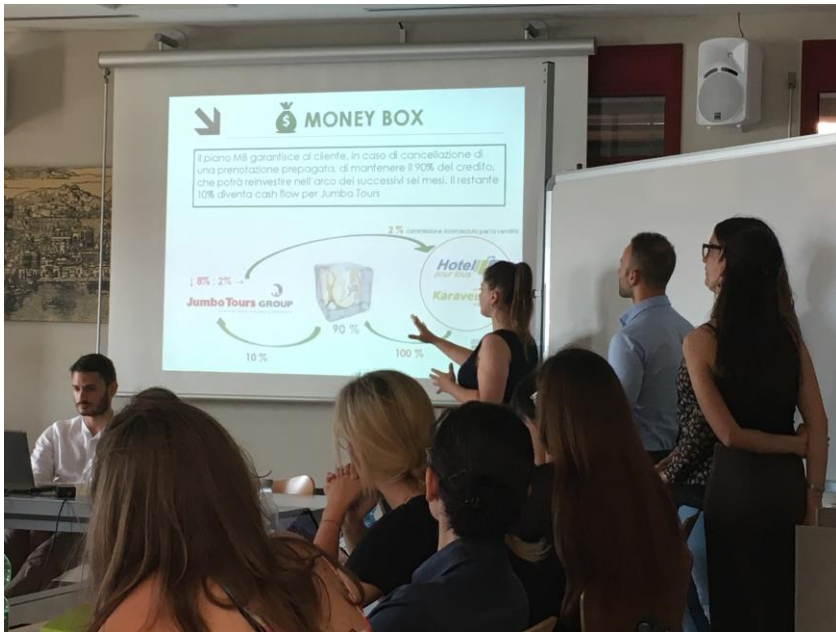


Fig. II.9. A group of Italian students presenting and discussing their work

Managing creation could be interpreted as managing changing situations. After a setback or chaos, there is a need to proceed and get the project to the old and sometimes to new tracks. It is easy to be creative when there is a back. The back, once again, can be tools, links to the structure of the semester and project that have been named earlier in this chapter. Creation and

creativity that might lead to a new track or something bigger than planned or expected need also a well co-operating team that has a joint vision where to go.

Furthermore, there is also need for openness to see possibilities in something that was not visible earlier. If student teams have difficulties with the change or if they are hesitant or afraid to choosing a new track, the role of coaching teachers is important. They can encourage students to go to a new direction to reach the agreed aims. This means that teachers must also be open-minded and brave enough to see options in a totally new direction.

2.5. Live projects with multidisciplinary classes

Managing live projects can be a challenge on its own, but managing it within classes composed by students coming from different backgrounds surely adds even more complexity.

“Multidisciplinarity” or “interdisciplinarity” is a basic feature of live projects. Facing a real business case usually requires knowledge and skills in more than one field. Furthermore, often the students’ group work on different briefs, and if the Students’ Consultancy is a transversal unit to more than one programme, those briefs can be referred to different industries. The commissioner representative can have a different background from the lecturer and the students, and see things from that perspective.

In this kind of environment, a multidisciplinary class can be an opportunity as well as a risk.

Exposure to individuals with different expertise, knowledge, and experience may be a key source of learning, as the interaction with people having different perspectives exposes each individual to new paradigms and ideas (Ven der Vegt & Bunderson, 2005). Teams composed by persons with diverse educational backgrounds and experiences are more likely to introduce change, innovation and creative solutions (Wiersema & Bantel, 1992; Jackson, 1992; Milliken & Martins, 1996; Tsui *et al.*, 1995). However, some scholars highlighted that a diversity in expertise can be associated to lower performance (Jackson, 1992; Milliken and Martins, 1996; Tsui *et al.*, 1995; Webber and Donahue, 2001; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998), as people who specialize in a given function or discipline, tend to develop a personal identity and social links around that function or discipline, and are driven to interact mainly with the members of that social network (Van Der Vegt & Bunderson, 2005). Therefore, the connate tendency is to stereotype individuals with a different kind of expertise rather than value them (Van Der Vegt & Bunderson, 2005). This kind of attitude can easily been observed within multidisciplinary teams composed by students as well, especially at the first steps of a live project. Sometimes, it might lead some member of the group to try and work on his/her own as the others “don’t understand”. This tends to happen also if they have been trained to cooperate with their colleagues from different backgrounds in other kinds of activities and projects: the pressure brought in by the commissioner’s expectations, in fact, leads everybody to “fall back” in their comfort zone to try to have a better control on the outcomes.

For these reasons, to manage live projects within multidisciplinary classes it is important for the lecturer to:

- give – or have – clear rules in building the groups: each group has to feature individuals coming from different backgrounds. Despite some difficulties, a mono-disciplinary group risks to rely heavily on granted pre-confectioned solutions, or not to see parts of the problem/opportunities at all;
- know they have to allow some more room for the students to “adjust” to each other’s expertise and understand some basic concepts and tools of the other disciplines;
- check the group dynamics to ensure that, if the work is divided among the members on the basis of their backgrounds, everybody is socialising their activity and results, and the different “pieces” are part of a shared research plan.

Given those few precautions, multidisciplinary groups are able to achieve the brief in innovative and creative ways, providing to the client and the lecturer different perspectives.

For this reason, if the brief requires the students to be creative, it is essential to mix up the members of the groups as much as possible, ensuring – if different education backgrounds are not possible – diverse origins, profile, knowledge level, learning style, motivation/educational purposes, social preferences.

2.6. Live projects at different university levels

All students at a university level can benefit from experiential learning. Of course, the first year students in a bachelor program have to be engaged in different kind of projects than students at a master (postgraduate level). The first project students are involved in, could even be an internal project such as organising a one day seminar with experts from business life. In these kind of projects students learn professional communication, time management, team working skills and for instance social media marketing and making a video can easily be added. Today many students have no or rather limited work experience when they enter university and thus a good starting point could be to learn professional ways of working. During the first year the project work must be strongly supported by the teachers but is still important to give some responsibility to the students otherwise they will not acquire the competences needed for the coming semesters.

During their second and third year of a bachelor program students can conduct more demanding projects that are commissioned by external organisations. At this stage students already know how to prepare a project plan, they have a basic understanding of research methods such as interviews and surveys and they are able to be in contact with the commissioner in a professional way. Support of the teacher/lecturer is still needed, but the way of working will go towards coaching. Students must acknowledge that not even the lecturers always have the answer to neither their question nor an idea of what the end result will be. At this stage students can work with projects related, for instance, to finding and contacting new customers, developing new service concepts

and preparation of social media communication plans. The brief of the project is though mostly described in detail and the projects aim at improving processes or activities at an operative level of the organisation.

At a master (postgraduate) level students usually have some working experience and at least 3,5 years of studies at a bachelor level behind them. This means that the projects offered to them can be more demanding and aiming at development and even innovation. At this level students can work as consultants, by collecting different kind of data, such as observations and interviews and by deeply analysing the data they can give recommendations that are based on analysis of the findings from different angles. Students in a master program still often ask for clear instructions and processes in the project but they are usually able to come up with creative solutions even if the project brief is less detailed as long as a weakness in the processes of the company has been acknowledged.

As a summary of the discussion above the conclusion can be drawn that younger students need clearer instructions in the starting phase (preferably written) and more support during the project than students in a master program. It is important to thoroughly consider what kind of project is suitable for which kind of students since a too complex project too soon will easily result in lost confidence but if the project is too easy and straightforward at a master level, students get unmotivated. The right project offers a suitable amount of challenge to the students.

3. The Lecturer

To effectively manage and facilitate such a learning pattern, the teachers and tutors should not only be passionate about his or her work, but also have similar experiences to build upon, and know precisely the dynamics and problems of the business sector field. This links to the presence of a commissioner/business client. It would be very hard for the unit leader to manage three parties' relationships (teacher-students-commissioner) if he/she isn't used to consultancy/applied research challenges. It is important then for the lecturer to step out from their academic role, and "transform" into consultants themselves.

Emphasising their features and role as consultants, not only teachers and researchers, is necessary

- because of the nature of the knowledge and skills that should be "taught": transversal skills and synthetic thinking have a share of tacit knowledge, that is transmitted by direct contact, behaviour imitation and shared experience;
- because they need to manage the relationship with the "commissioner", who has its own goals, times, and priorities;
- because the consultancy projects are very sector and business specific: in order to interact with the commissioner and help the students the teacher should possess precise knowledge of the dynamics and problems of that specific business industry.

3.1. Qualities

Teachers working in higher educational institutions have normally at least a master level education or higher. Most often, teachers' degrees are from more traditional universities and not e.g. from universities of applied sciences. There are, of course exceptions in countries where universities of applied sciences can also give master level degrees. Depending the traditions and history of various countries and universities, teachers can have doctoral degrees that mean that they have researchers' education. All in all, teachers in higher educational institutions are well educated with a proper academic degree in their pockets.

To apply experiential learning in teaching or more when enhancing learning, a higher degree is not enough. Teachers must have other qualifications as well. It is easy to list these other qualifications just by looking at vacancies in institutions. It is good to remind here, that academic qualifications are the top priority when choosing new people, but other qualifications are more important now than earlier. In experiential learning teacher skills and hopefully some kind of teacher training is more than relevant in a contemporary university. Furthermore, a new member of an academic staff should have also work life experience or at least contacts to it, preferably he/she has already a network of stakeholders. Project work and language skills are needed as well. When teachers work with people, people and communication skills are obvious.

So, the list of competences and skills is long for any position in the academic world. An extensive list of publications is not anymore that valuable as it used to be in the past. Of course, there are exceptions here as well. When the clue in experiential learning is creating knowledge together through experiences, openness and ability to learn are competences what teachers need. In joint knowledge creation, it is good if a teacher can sometimes forget his/her academic background and widen the horizons. A traditional discipline-based degree gives a teacher a solid basement of something, but it is not enough. It is needed, but a teacher must be able to apply it and communicate or even interpret it to students when they need it. Teachers like students must be brave enough to get out of their comfort zones in their various roles in experiential learning and jump into the flow of learning.

A teacher training is important, but it can't be too traditional. Teachers are not anymore gate keepers of knowledge and controllers of it. Neither do they always know anymore how the knowledge could be used or implemented in e.g. real life commissioned projects. Today, knowledge must be shared, and it must be created together for contemporary needs. Teachers must also understand the need of the use of more participatory methods to enhance learning.

3.2. Role

Teachers' role in higher educational institutions is changing or it has already changed. When implementing other pedagogies than lecture-based, teachers turn from a lecturer to a co-learner.

Teachers are no longer dictators of a classroom. This change is already happening in elementary and high schools. Pupils and students with an access knowledge e.g. on the Internet of travelling, can be very savvy and know more about topics than the teacher in front of the classroom. If co-learner sounds a bit difficult, co-walker is also a good concept when describing teachers' new role in higher education.

When students learn in real life projects, together and when creating knowledge in teams or groups, the focus is not anymore on teaching or a teacher. Teachers are not anymore subjects and students are not anymore objects. They all are subjects. It is good to remember that the change of the roles brings both students and teachers new responsibilities. Teachers are not anymore totally responsible of the learning. It belongs to students.

The essence of the function of a lecturer in this context is to achieve the intended education goals and to stimulate students learning.

Rather than telling students about where they need to learn and what sequence they are doing, the lecturer should help students make that decision for them.

Although the teacher must be able to maintain the learning severity, and to cope with an aggressive student who dominates the group and provokes a conflict, his/her activity is "limited" to help the students to achieve their own set learning goals.

Teachers should then enhance learning in best ways, but according to the situation. The same methods can't be used in different situations. Anyhow, it is good to remember that teachers are still experts in pedagogy and didactics. On the top of pedagogy and didactics, teachers must be able to facilitate learning with tools they provide. Facilitating learning allows teachers to exploit opportunities of ubiquitous learning because learning takes place everywhere, also outside the university facilities.

When the main task of teachers in experiential learning is enhancing learning, older methods are perhaps not anymore that valid or useful. Especially if the older methods are more used in classroom settings. When learning takes place more and more outside classrooms and outside institution walls, teachers must be able to reach and help the students elsewhere or with other, less traditional ways. When students must reach different aims, or they meet personal or project related challenges, teachers change to e.g. coaches who try to lead students from the dead end to a new direction. In a demanding business case, students might need a mentor to encourage them towards creative solutions.

3.3. The challenge of low control

Traditionally teachers control or have a learning situation under their control. This is also emphasised in teacher training. The strong emphasis in teachers' control dates to the idea of teachers' responsibility on learning and teachers as subjects in

it. It has also been easy to control learning situations when pupils and students have worked under teachers' everything seeing eyes. Anything disturbing a learning situation has been stopped with different methods. In so called good old days, a good learning situation was controlled where the participants sat silent and listening in a classroom. Probably, in the end of a lecture other participants could make some questions. Otherwise, the floor or stage was teacher's. A perfect teacher was controlling and strict. Similar teachers still exist, and to certain extent they could be role models to some of us.

When learning is in the responsibility of students or any learner, the control is not anymore in the hands of teachers. Of course, in experiential learning, teachers do have control and responsibilities, but in a different way that in lecture-based pedagogy. Furthermore, when learning can take and often takes place somewhere else than under the eyes of teachers and outside university premises, teachers' control is much lower than earlier. This change and the challenge of lower control have some impact on teachers' thinking. First, teachers must start to trust students. The trust comes when teachers know students better. In lecture-based pedagogy, students often formed a mass of young people sitting passively in a classroom. It was easy to classify them to a group of lazy and stupid people who were supposed to be controlled. Otherwise, they wouldn't learn anything. In experiential learning where knowledge is created together, students turn to individuals who have strengths and weaknesses, they turn to real people. Thus, the need for high control disappears.

Facilitating of learning is another tool to lower the control level of it. This is in the hands of teachers. They must be able to use methods and present learning spaces that make learning interesting. Of course, experiential learning as such makes learning more interesting and engaging, thus the need of high control simply disappears. The deeper change here is teachers' perception of a man. When teachers understand that students are in principle good or they try to do well, but are human, there is not anymore need for high control. Students' prize is learning.

3.4. Stages of learning and the lecturer's role

Experiential learning can be interpreted in numerous ways. In this chapter, inquiry-based, problem-based and project-based are named. Each of the approaches has stages. The most structured is problem-based learning with an international model with several stages. Inquiry-based learning is more flexible, and its stages depend on the interpretation of it. Finally, project-based learning that is the most flexible approach where the project steers the process. Thus, it would be difficult to name the individual stages and try to understand tutor's role in all of them.

Perhaps, a good starting point would be that each tutor teacher should know his or her role in the stages of the process. It is not enough just to know the roles, but also to act according to them. When changing from a lecture-based pedagogy where one teacher has the full responsibility of the course, he or she knows well the roles. In experiential approaches teachers normally work in teams of teachers where it is much easier to leave some work to the peers. This is one of the biggest challenges here.

The reason is probably not that teachers would be lazy, but so many are used to work individually, and team work is something new. Furthermore, teachers don't always think that a colleague's workload grows if others don't contribute what is required. There is always someone who might do the pending job.

Tutors should also be able to rationalise students what are principles behind each step and communicate when the stage is finished and there is the time to proceed to the next stage.

3.5. Ground rules

As stated in the previous chapter, each approach in experiential learning has different processes, thus there are no common rules for the processes. Despite, it is important to have rules for all who are involved in the learning process. There are common rules for each approach that have been designed and agreed when the approach was planned and latest then when it was taken into the use. These common rules might vary according to the roles involved, like teacher teams have certain specific rules as well as student teams.

Even commissioners have rules that can be related e.g. to meetings with students when giving the commission and when getting the results. Whatever the rules are they must be applied equally between the members and teams in the process.

A mandatory rule is the engagement of all stakeholders in the process. And that each team member whatever the team is, contributes to the work. Furthermore, equal division of work is important because in most of the cases student members get

the same amount of credits and perhaps the same grade than the rest of the team in the end of the project. The same rule must be applied in teacher teams as well while teachers often get the same amount of time resources when working with students in an experiential learning project.

Communication is important in experiential learning where the process doesn't always follow the planned guidelines.

Especially teachers who coach and mentor students should have the same message when talking with student teams. The message must be discussed in teacher teams' meetings. This means that teachers must, like students join the meetings. Joining the meetings is part of the engagement to the project and its process.

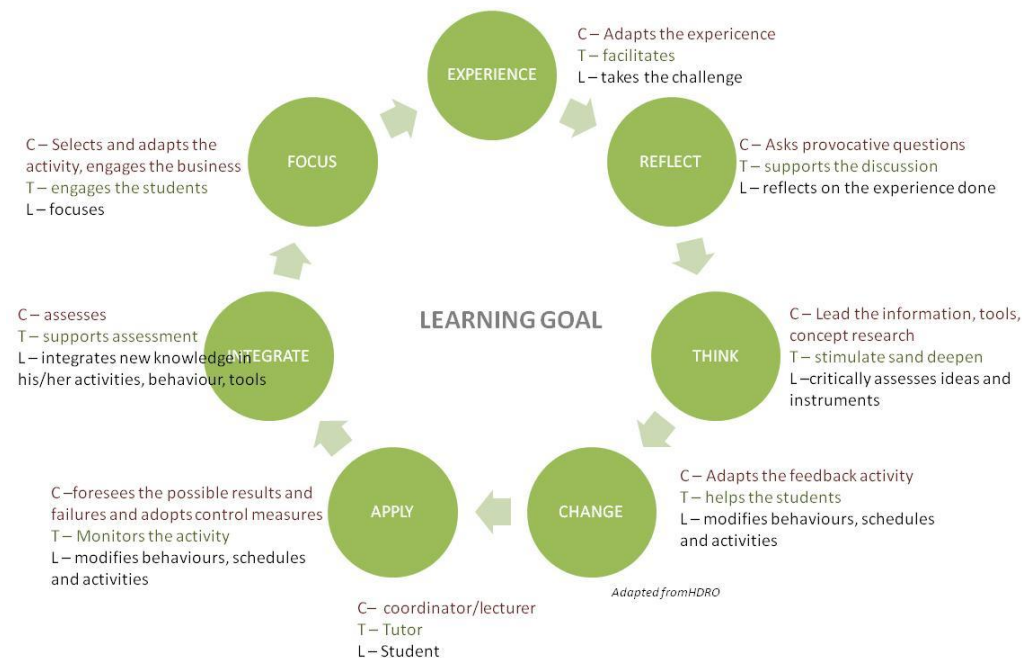


Fig. II.10. The learning cycle and the activities of the lecturer, tutors and students per each step

3.6. Creating the teams

When knowledge is created together, most often in smaller or bigger teams, teams involved in the process must be operational and functional. To build good teams, especially in the beginning of the studies is demanding. Students don't know

each other neither the teachers involved. There is always a challenge to get the “right” people to work together: people who complete or supplement each other. There is no use building teams with similar people. Five pairs of hands might work if there would be a planner as one member in their team. Five planners can’t get anything done while they would be too busy in planning. It would be easy to continue the list. A team really needs different people. In the beginning of their studies, students don’t know yet their peers. If they were allowed to build teams, they would start with students sitting in the next chair or someone who sat in the same table for lunch. This might work, but probably not with the best results. Thus, also teachers must understand that people have various roles in teams according to their strengths and potential.

After getting to know their peers, students can much easier build a successful team without any help from teachers. This sounds great, but to have only friends in a team doesn’t guarantee the best possible outcome. It is not enough that working together is fun and smooth. When creating student teams, teachers should know students well. But it is also recommendable that students can have the initiative and significant role in team building.

Team building is not only about putting together groups of people with various competences and characteristics. A good team should reach the given aims of the project they would work with. A group of people who work well together must also share similar values when it comes to finish the project and reach the aims of it. Similar values, ambition level and e.g. commitment

are very important as well. One tool to get team members to reach a common goal is to introduce them the team canvas. “The Team Canvas” is a Business Model Canvas for teamwork. It is a free tool for leaders, facilitators and consultants to organize team alignment meetings and bring members on the same page, resolve conflicts and build productive culture, fast” (Team Canvas, 2018).

Team Canvas Version 0.8 | theteamcanvas.com | hello@theteamcanvas.com

Team name Date

PEOPLE & ROLES <small>Who are our members and how do we know them?</small>	COMMON GOALS <small>What are our common goals? What are our individual goals? What are our shared goals?</small>	VALUES <small>What are our values? What are our guiding principles? What are our common values that we want to be at the core of our team?</small>	RULES & ACTIVITIES <small>What are our rules? What are our activities? What are our rituals? What are our shared activities?</small>
PURPOSE <small>Why are we doing what we are doing? What are our shared goals?</small>		NEEDS & EXPECTATIONS <small>What are our needs? What are our expectations? What are our shared needs and expectations?</small>	
STRENGTHS & ASSETS <small>What are the skills we have in the team that will help us achieve our goals? What are our individual strengths? What are our shared strengths?</small>		WEAKNESSES & RISKS <small>What are the weaknesses we have, individually and as a team? What are our shared weaknesses? What are our shared risks?</small>	

Team Canvas is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 license. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

Fig. II.11. The Team Canvas (Team Canvas, 2018)

Figure II.11 shows the main topics of the team canvas that should help team members to share the vision of the project and engage into it. The team canvas is filled in together with the team members.

3.7. The lecturer as a team member

If students sometimes might struggle in their teams and team work, it is also allowed to teachers. As teachers are not always used to team work, challenges can probably be like those faced in student teams. Still today, most of the teachers in higher educational institutions have started their careers with a different teacher image in their minds, and of course in the profession itself. Teachers have traditionally worked alone and individually, and the change to team teaching or working can be even frightening. The switch from an expert in front of students knowing answers to all their questions to only a one member of a team is huge. The huge change includes also the fact that knowledge is build and created in multi-disciplinary teams of other teachers. Another change is to co-operate closer with students and their teams and become in the end an equal member in more multi-faceted teams.

The change of the role, not only becoming a member of a team, but also from teacher to facilitator etc. is not easy. The question is not being less individual and visible, but necessity to share knowledge, material and opinions with peers. Often, peers are seen probably savvier, smart and taking a role in a teacher team that is not very usual. Teachers can't always choose their teams, especially in the times of change. The administrators, supervisors, managers and directors can move teachers in the organisation like pawns on the chess board. Furthermore, teacher teams can change after semesters and academic years, or by project. It is important to a contemporary teacher to adapt to the change inside the organisation as well.

One of the challenges in teacher teams is formal, polite and proper behaviour. Teachers can have difficulties to express their real feelings in front of peers when it comes to problems in team working. As individualists some of colleagues might take dissimilar roles than agreed or do less with students than agreed or missing meetings. The easiest way to solve these problems would obviously be telling about them to directors. But even bigger problem is that directors don't have time for this, and they prefer that teams solved them by themselves. This is also required from student teams. As students must also assess their own and their peers' performance in experiential learning, teachers should learn to do as well. A useful tool for teacher teams is, of course the team canvas.

3.8. Managing emotions

In experiential learning, and its various approaches it is difficult to keep the old-fashioned distance between teachers and students. More equal ways of working and new roles of teachers, students and industry representatives make all at least learners. New roles can make stakeholder encounters different, and this difference can raise emotions. Perhaps, in everyday life the emotions are expressed when working with different tasks and assignments with named team members and schedules. The feeling of being left alone, not appreciated, not listened to, ignored and not following agreed guidelines, makes easily a team of students to a boiling milk kettle. The same can be applied also to teacher teams, thus in fact teams work more or less in a similar way. The boiling phase is reached

earlier in student teams than in teacher teams for distinct reasons that are listed e.g. in the previous chapter.

To manage emotions is not always easy. Both teachers and students have their personal lives with ups and downs that have impacts in team work. People working in teams are individuals who react to situations in diverse ways. Some people pay attention to details, others follow wider lines. People have expectations from each other and these expectations are most often created by others, not by the person him- or herself.

The best way to manage emotions is to give space to them. To keep emotions only inside won't lead to anything good or useful. Spaces for emotions can be team meetings, mentoring discussions and coaching session to name a few. Emotions can be managed by e.g. letting team members to express them in writing, drawing or dancing. There should be space for emotions in schedules, during team work and meetings. A physical space is also needed. Team members must be encouraged to express and talk about their feelings because openness helps teams to reach the wanted aims better.

The stress level generated by all these elements is quite high. To guide the students through this test, the teaching approach developed is based on:

- debate;
- dialogue – the teacher's role is more to ask the right questions than to give answers;

- teachers as active learners, as they acquire information, and insight about the company and the specific problem partially through the students work;
- units not planned as neat and predictable, whatever the kind (specific units within the curriculum, transversal learning experiences, final project works or thesis); constant supervising and feedback is essential, especially to help the students to stay focused on the main issues – complex real life problems can display a wide variety of sub-problems and the students tend to be distracted from the central point, particularly at the early stages of the research.

3.10 Giving feedback and guiding reflection: the key activity

Giving feedback and coaching (see e.g., Withmore, 2017) are key activities in experiential learning. It is important that the lecturer/professor makes it clear for the students that not even she/he has all the answers and knows what the result will be, but the project is a journey they go on together. From the beginning it is important that the students acknowledge that it is their project, but they will get all the support they need.

Students at bachelor level usually need support regularly, maybe even once a week. At this level it works better with team coaching, if the instructions are given to the whole class many students do not listen and when the instructions are given many students are afraid of asking for clarification of the instructions

if something is unclear. Coaching small team of 4 to 8 persons is time consuming but pays usually off. The coaching session takes preferably place face to face and it is stated that the session is compulsory for all team members even if the team comprises a team leader and ordinary members. All students in the team should learn and actively discuss different strategies for proceeding in the project. Coaching sessions can preferably start with a small discussion about the team spirit and division of work in the team. Moreover, coaching sessions are solution oriented. If some critics are in place it is recommendable to give the critics in a constructive way. Students should gain confidence through the projects, not be turned down. Mistakes and failure must be accepted as long as the students do not communicate with the commissioner and the stakeholders of the projects in an inappropriate way.

Master students are usually more confident, mature and might even have experience from working in real life projects. They do still often need support during the process since the context in which the project takes place can be completely new to the students. Coaching sessions can though be offered on demand rather than once a week as with the bachelor students. Students in a master program should also be able (and allowed) to make major project related decisions by themselves. It is also important to create a forum where the teams of master students can meet and coach each other. Master students have often practical skills and experiences from the industry that lecturers working for a long time at the university only have read about.

3.11. Motivating the students

Birkle, Holmberg, Karlqvist and Ritalahti (2017) discuss student motivation in experiential learning with empirical data from one real-life project. The key issues identified as having an impact on motivation in that guidebook chapter have been acknowledged as important issues to consider in any project. Most students will do the minimum required in the project since they accept that they need to pass the course, i.e. so called extrinsic motivators make them to do the work. Best results are though gained when students are motivated also by intrinsic factors such as personal development and learning new. To get the intrinsic factors to dominate the students work in the project, the lecturer should focus at least on the following:

- finding a committed commissioner: If the students realise that the commissioner is honestly interested in their work by for instance meeting up with them regularly, students will try to do their best;
- identifying a project that is challenging but not too difficult: a project that is too challenging will easily result in students “giving up”, on the other hand students won’t appreciate projects not offering them a possibility to learn new things;
- allowing the students to create the teams themselves: if students are forced to work in a team comprising students with very heterogeneous level of ambition, it will often result in conflicts and a negative team spirit. A negative team spirit is unmotivating, the project becomes easily only a “must” not an inspiring learning experience;
- clear guidelines for what to do with students not actively participating in the project: So called free-riders exist

every now and then in real-life projects. The lecturer should make it clear that this kind of behaviour is unacceptable and that a student can be kicked out of a team. If discussions with the student not contributing don't result in changed behaviour the lecturer should tell the student that she/he is welcome to course next year again (or has to do a similar project by him- or herself);

- supporting the students during the process: if the project lasts for a whole semester there will always be ups and downs during the process. If a down period seems to go on for too long something must be done. Would it be possible to make a visit to the commissioning organisation to learn more or could a guest lecturer with experience from the industry help the students to get back on track? It is also recommendable to agree upon some deliverables students have to prepare during the process. If the project is divided into some smaller tasks (which are part of the assessment) it will help students to proceed and stay motivated and the last deliverable to hand in won't be too extensive since it will be built of the deliverables done so far.

3.12 Time management

Universities work with semesters and academic years thus some time management is usually needed when students learn through real-life projects. The project is usually part of a course or a module and some results must be reached before students move on to new courses or to a new semester. At bachelor

level the lecturer/professor has to plan how the project will be conducted together with the commissioner, maybe not at any small detail but the big picture should be visible for the students when they start. Students at master level also would prefer this way of working, and then they know when the most time-consuming phases of the project will take place.

One way of working with time management is to ask students to work with the project in phases, of which the first phase would be a project plan (see Figure XV). In the project plan students plan their activities based on the demands of the commissioner and the team of lecturers involved. A Gantt chart (<https://templates.office.com/en-us/Simple-Gantt-Chart-TM16400962>) can be a good tool to combine with the project plan. Depending on how much time has been planned for the whole project at least one other major checkpoint is needed about half away in the project. If the aim of the project is to collect data for instance by surveys and interviews the checkpoint could be when students have prepared the data collection tools and the detailed plans for data collection. The third checkpoint would be a couple of weeks before results are to be presented, and then students would still have time to revise their findings and recommendations.

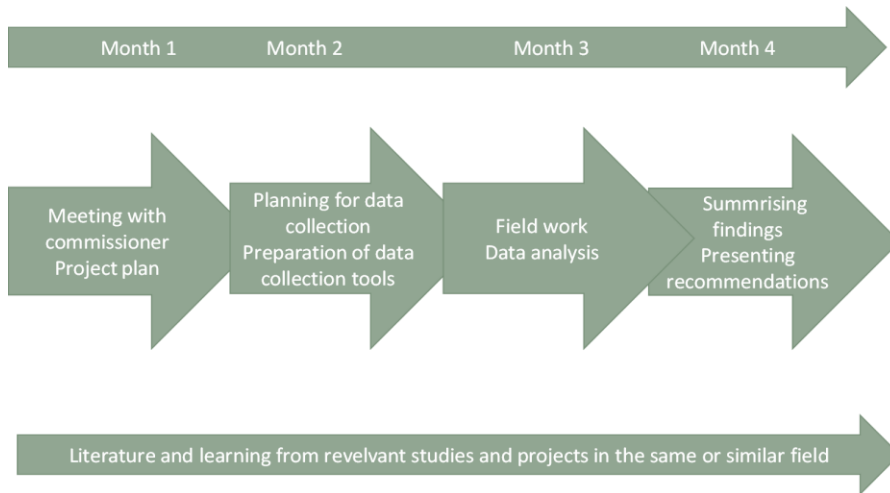


Fig. II. 6 Process of a project lasting one semester

As stated earlier, students at their first and second year at a bachelor program should be asked to meet up with the lecturer(s) for coaching weekly or every second week. These coaching sessions can though be rather short, 10 minutes, if anything bigger is on the agenda. More extensive feedback could then be given to the project plan, the plans for field work as well as when preliminary findings are ready.

CASE STUDIES: INVOLVING THE STUDENTS, FINDING AND MANAGING THE COMMISSIONER

CASE STUDY 1. FIRST STEPS IN INVOLVING THE STUDENTS AND THE COMMISSIONER

Research about cultural tourism in Catalonia

**“Tourism related topics” course, Bachelor’s Degree in Tourism,
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona**

Teaching staff: Carme Ruiz

INTRODUCTION

The “Tourism related topics” course is included in the Bachelor’s Degree in Tourism at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). This is an optional training of 6 ECTS credits done in the fourth year. The subject gives students knowledge and techniques related to the capacity for analysis and critical thinking about excellence and the most appropriate practices to be implemented in the different types of tourism companies.

OBJECTIVES AND TEACHING METHODS

The objective is to think and design tourist strategies (independently of the sector) to differentiate themselves from the competition. Coinciding with the start of the semester, in February 2018, the teacher presented the theoretical part of

Live Project to students and asked to volunteer, in order to implement the study of a real case, replacing the practices planned in the different theoretical modules of the course. The objective is to work in a practical way: “there is a real need to solve” (C. Ruiz, interview, June 5th, 2018). In a territorial context (Inland Catalonia) characterized by a tourist sector of cultural tourism products in a learning phase: “The companies that want to dedicate themselves to management do not know how to deal with the cultural resources located in the interior territory” (M. Abril, interview, June 6th, 2018).

The resolution of the practical case is resolved exclusively in the classroom. The representative of the company is invited to come to the School of Tourism & Hotel Management.

OUTPUT AND APPLIED CASE

A total of 3 Erasmus students participated, as volunteers, in the experimental performance of a live project during the course. They named the project *Research about Cultural tourism in Catalonia*. These students analyzed the foreign perception (in origin) of the tourist cultural routes located in inner Catalonia. The results were part of the demand of the Cooltur company and could be integrated in the future as a tourist service. Cooltur¹ is a Cultural Tourism company that offers guidance

¹ <https://www.cooltur.org/>

services to discover history and territory through cultural routes based on the history and local heritage of Catalonia.

The Cooltur's CEO came to the University to introduce himself to students and explain the need. Once students accepted to be part of that research, the CEO didn't come anymore. But he maintained the contact with students by e-mail.

Virtual tutorials with the commissioner allowed students to solve the work, helping them: "to study the market in their countries of origin through their contacts and determine which of those routes could have more tourist output and how to market it internationally. What was the cultural route that could work better in inner Catalonia" (C. Ruiz, interview, June 5th, 2018).

EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING

The follow-up of the evaluation of the live project experience corresponds to 60% of the overall mark (which is the value given by the teacher to solve the practices planned in the different theoretical modules of the course "Tourism related topics"). A report is produced by students participating in live project. It includes the results to send to the commissioner.

FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND THE COMMISSIONER

According to the students' opinion survey the assessment was very positive (4) in relation to the organisation of the course, the time frame and the teaching methods employed. It was also

positive (3) regarding the methodology, the applicability as well as the general assessment (expectations, satisfaction and recommendation of the action). The student evaluates the Live Project experience positively, emphasizing the idea to work with real company. Actually, students consider that the time working for the company should be longer.

According to the commissioner's opinion survey, the commissioner considers that the Live Project experience has been useful for the company (Cooltur): "The truth is that, yes. The experience has been very positive, and the work done by the students has given us valuable information on how to improve some of the aspects of how to promote us. The study offers us to know the interests of different segments of potential customers, and what guidelines we can use to promote ourselves and cover these potential new clients".

On the other hand, it is valued that the student, teacher and commissioner relationship has been good; although there has not been much contact due to the difficulty of the agenda. The contact has been through the electronic mail aside from a face-to-face meeting at the beginning.

Finally, the commissioner states that the Live Project format adopted in the *Research about Cultural tourism in Catalonia* is ideal for the company: "The truth is that the Live Project program is very interesting and useful to us".

Regarding the assessment of the teacher, there is a state of satisfaction considering that the objectives of the course have been exceeded. Adding that for the 2018-2019 course it could be included as mandatory practice. Thus, “it can be divided into groups working the same project because it is difficult to send a large number of students to the company” (C. Ruiz, interview, June 5th, 2018).

However, some problems are also highlighted. On the one hand, the live project should not involve any extra work or time for students. They are overloaded with work and can be a rejection due to this aspect. On the other hand, the formation of the degree (unlike the master's degree) tends to be numerous groups of 50 students or more, and this has effects on the organisation of a live project.

CASE STUDY 2. INVOLVING THE COMMISSIONER THROUGH THE STUDENTS.

You Mi DMC Final Degree Project

**Final Degree Project - Bachelor's Degree in Hotel Management,
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona**

Teaching staff: Carme Ruiz and Gemma Sagué

INTRODUCTION

This case study was born as a merge of the needs of two subjects included in the Bachelor's Degree in Hotel Management at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) to respond to the Live Project methodology: The Final Degree Project and the Work Placement.

The FDP (Final Degree Project) is a mandatory training of 12 ECTS credits normally undertaken in the fourth year. The project can be developed in pairs although the evaluation is individualized. The Final Degree Project is the culmination of learning outcomes from four courses and evaluates the achievement and the integrated consolidation of the specific and transversal competences associated with the training program of the Degree. The FDP consists of the realization of research and/or practical work related to the creation or improvement of a project, product or Tourist Company, supervised by a director or a tutor.

The Work Placement (12 ECTS) is about enhancing the teaching cycle by the completion of an internship (250 h.) in an organization within the tourism sector. While it brings the students to a closer professional reality of the industry it acts as a spring board to their future professional careers, developing their hard and soft skills too.

OBJECTIVES AND TEACHING METHODS

The work of the FDP consists of 300 hours. 57% of hours correspond to autonomous work by students. The remaining 43% is distributed between theory sessions, supervised activities and tutorials. The Work Placement expects the student to recap many of the lessons learned down in a Memorandum, which was adapted in this occasion to the content mentioned above.

With these ideas in mind, the objective of that FDP was to create a business plan (students named it You Mi DMC) that included the design and/or improvement of a product or company within the real tourism sector. Consequently, the project pursued the development of a business strategy useful for the field of a catering company specifically.

The goal to work from a practical way on a theme proposed from the beginning exclusively by the students was reached from its conception: "The girls began to do the FDP and were very clear that they wanted to make a receptive agency for

Chinese people in Barcelona” (C. Ruiz, interview, June 5th, 2018).

In parallel, as in the Workplace subject, the students could broaden and apply the theoretical knowledge on the various topics covered during the degree, got the experience and the knowledge from a real professional environment and developed their professional skills based in the real current labour market.

The students made a business plan that integrated a Market research, Marketing plan, Operations plan, Organization and Human resources, Sales forecast, Financial and Contingency planning and development.

OUTPUT AND APPLIED CASE

The Business Plan was designed for Sarova Catering. This company offers a catering service with three different product lines: Telling Stories, with a product aimed at family celebrations, private, institutional or business events. Better Together which consists of a gastronomic service at home. Finally, Sweet Sarova with a line of sweets such as cakes or cookies, among other desserts.

One of the students already knew the company because she was finishing her internship with them in the context of the Work Placement subject. The communication between the teachers and the company, to cover the FDP and Workplace subjects applied as Live Project, took place in February 2018.

In fact, **the thematic initiative in the Live Project context came from the students** inspired by Gemma Sagué, acting as the Work Placement Tutor: “the commissioner did not ask anything, but the students saw a business opportunity” (C. Ruiz, interview, June 5th, 2018); “there should be a way to join interests” (G. Sagué). The student realized during the internship that “the company had the capacity to open itself within the business catering market and marriages for Chinese people”. Therefore, “it was an idea that came from the student, not from the company” (C. Ruiz, interview, June 5th, 2018) and could respond to the Live Project principles after a small tutor stimulus to “analyse the opportunities that could arise in the company from that intra-preneurship perspective” (G. Sagué).

The conception from the students made possible an oral presentation organized by the professors with the aim of presenting it to Sarova’s manager. This occurred in February 2018, achieving a positive response from the company, which provided resources (such as data) to carry out the study. The development of the FDP and Work Placement Memorandum (and Live Project at the same time) did not take place using the facilities of the company, with the exception of the final presentation of results, which was carried out on June 18th (Figures 1-3).



Fig. 1 and 2. Students presenting the results of their business plan in the company's office supported by the tutors.



Fig. 3. The commissioner from Sarova Catering debating with students at the end of the presentation.

EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING

The evaluation of the FDP comes from 100% of the Live Project experience. This includes the written documentation of the FDP as well as the tutorials and the final presentation.

FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND THE COMMISSIONER

According to the students opinion survey, the assessment was positive (3) in relation to the organization of the course and the time frame, and very positive (4) regarding the methodology, the applicability, the teaching methods employed as well as the general assessment (expectations, satisfaction and recommendation of the action).

The students evaluated the Live Project experience positively, emphasizing that: “The experience is much more real thanks to the involvement of the company; the work is an experience and a job opportunity, separate from academia; it allows contact with the real world work during the project”. On the other side, there were no indications for improvement or aspects to be limited.

Finally, and as far as the suggestions are concerned, it is claimed that projects of this type should be carried out in a more

continuous and habitual way. Especially since it is a much more practical and real way to gain theoretical knowledge in a deeper and practical manner. The students feel closer to the real world and can see their operation “in situ”. It is a very good experience for both parts, students and companies, and an opportunity to meet each other.

According to the commissioner’s opinion survey, the commissioner affirms that the Live Project experience has been useful for the company (Sarova): “It is always useful to know about new options of business to incorporate. Unfortunately, companies such as ours don’t have much time to analyze other business viability”.

In addition, it is appreciated that the student, teacher and commissioner relationship has been excellent. In this sense the commissioner highlights the rigorous contribution of the students. As a final comment on the project, the commissioner would not introduce any methodological change in future Live Project experiences.

CASE STUDY 3.

Bookingness: A technical brief? An example of the risks entailed by briefs perceived as just technical issues.

Master's in The Economics And Management of Tourism – Ca' Foscari University Venice and Ciset

Teaching staff: Federica Montaguti

INTRODUCTION

The Master's programme in the Economics and Management of Tourism has been using Students' Consultancy as a teaching method for 15 years. The live project is an activity on its own, transversal to and taking place at the same time as other courses. It keeps the students busy for about 3 months. The different students' team can work all for the same commissioner, or for different ones.

In AY 2016-17 one of the teams was commissioned by Promoservice - an SME providing digital and innovation services - to explore if it was possible to train a neural network to forecast booking cancellation, and then realise from this a tool integrating the revenue management systems to support hotel managers in their decision making.

Cancellations are a main issue for the hospitality industry, as it is impossible to stock a night, and therefore a cancelled reservation is a loss. For this reason, optimising overbooking is a non-pricing strategy essential to the revenue management. However, so far the overbooking management relies mainly on

the managers' experience, with some minor imprecise support tool.

OBJECTIVES AND TEACHING METHODS

The objective of the project was then to understand if and how AI could be effectively used to support the hotel managers in making decisions about overbooking in their everyday activity. This meant:

- train the AI using the data on booking and cancellations coming from three different hotels, in order to choose an algorithm that could forecast which booking was going to be cancelled, keeping error to a minimum ;
- verify the performance of the chosen algorithm in reality, forecasting the cancellations for the following period in the three hotels, and then compare the forecasting with what actually happened;
- assess if the AI could offer an easier to use and more effective help in forecasting cancellations;
- build the basis for a tool supporting hotels revenue and general managers to manage overbooking.

The learning goals were to develop transferrable skills (problem solving, team working, etc.), but also to address knowledge and technical abilities, about:

- capacity management;
- revenue management, and revenue management systems;
- channel management, and channel management systems;

- rates and conditions;
- variables affecting the tourists behaviour (e.g. people who booked to celebrate some event won't cancel easily;
- design and marketing for the new tool.

OUTPUT AND APPLIED CASE

The students learned directly from the commissioner how to use the software and the various steps to train the neural network, test the diverse algorithms, and the different variables and data to feed them (or not).

Their business “tutor” was in fact a computer programmer, as well as the company CEO.

To do this they looked for more information about algorithms, and the training of neural networks. They tested the algorithms performance on the data of the three hotels, and identified the best one in each case. At the end of the work the forecasting algorithm still needed some more tuning, but it was already more effective than what is at the moment available. In fact, it allowed to foresee not only how many, but which reservations precisely were going to be cancelled.

The students showed that they could learn easily how to manage the hotels data, use the API and train the AI, assessing the results they got out of it.

However, despite the solicitations not only from the lecturer, but also from another commissioner of that year live projects, they seemed satisfied when they identified the “right” algorithm: they

were less interested in the other aspects of their work, such as understanding if their “training” process could be automatised, or easily explained to be re-enacted, how to make information on probability easier to read and “digest” for the hotel manager, etc.



Fig. 1. The BookinGuess team presenting the results to the lecturers, the commissioner, and their fellow students

They finally addressed those issues, but showing some difficulties in changing perspective.

STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND THE COMMISSIONER'S OPINION

For the reasons explained above, both the evaluation of the lecturer of the live project and the one of the lecturers and researchers who were there at the final discussion was not completely positive. The students were judged very positively for learning how to deal so quickly with a knowledge domain completely new - none of them studied computer science or mathematics, and the majority came for language studies or humanities backgrounds – and for having obtained also good results in using new tools. In the words of the commissioner “it took them 3 or 4 Skype calls and then they were operative” (Mingotto, 2017, 24 - transl. by the case author).

On the other hand, their understanding of the managerial aspects implied or directly addressed in the brief was evaluated to be incomplete, in spite of the final effort put into it.

The commissioner, although initially satisfied, in the end realised himself that “they risked not to see the most important part of their job – interpreting the results provided by the machine to find possible solutions to the problem they were asked to address” (*ibid.*)

As for the students, the commissioner himself noted that at the beginning they were very anxious about the API and the algorithms, but then they realised that it was easier than they thought (*ibid.*)

On a positive note, this case underlines how quickly students can be able to acquire knowledge and tools they never heard of before. This confirms that they can achieve results they don't think possible themselves. On the other side, the anxiety related to having to face the “unknown”, once solved, let them think that the most part of the job was done, despite what hinted by the lecturer, and others. It is true that their brief entailed a strong technical work, but that one was finished early enough to let them reflect on the rest.

The business tutor figure was also somehow just partially understood as the students probably saw mainly his job as programmer and less his role as CEO, and therefore were led to think that he would be perfectly satisfied if they solved the technical aspect of the problem.

This is possibly the reason why they didn't immediately act on the hints coming from other sources.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

CASE STUDY 4.

The team leader commissioner. An example of the risks entailed by commissioners too “in charge”.

Master’s in The Economics And Management of Tourism – Ca’ Foscari University Venice and Ciset

Teaching staff: Federica Montaguti

INTRODUCTION

Live projects within the role of students’ consultancy have been integrated in the activities of the Master’s programme in the Economics and Management of tourism organised by Ca’ Foscari University Venice and Ciset since 2004/05. Students’ Consultancy is an activity on its own, transversal to the other courses, that keep the students busy, together with the other courses, for about 3 months.

The consultancy project within the live project 2014-15 activities was developed in cooperation with a main international hotel chain.

The project concerned one of the hotels the chain managed, a luxury hotel overlooking the Grand Canal in Venice.

The focus was on the restaurant of the hotel, an outlet with great potential the commissioner felt could be better exploited, and therefore in need of a repositioning concept and plan.

The whole Master’s class worked on this project. In order to stimulate the best performance and results it was decided to

divide the 24 Master’s students into two competing teams with the same goal.

Each team was split into three smaller groups, one to be focussing on benchmarking and competitive intelligence, one on operations, and the third one on branding. Each team had to propose a new concept for the restaurant, and design all the needed to re-position the restaurant accordingly, from changes in the menu, to interior design, different opening hours, marketing activities, internal training, etc.

Both teams were required to review the financial aspects related to the business and take it into account as far as their proposals were concerned.

OBJECTIVES AND TEACHING METHODS

Although apparently a “small” case, the brief offered an important challenge to the students. Achieving the brief required many different technical skills: the students had to deepen their knowledge about restaurant management, cuisine, food cost, and devise a methodology to analyse effectively the current situation of the restaurant kitchen and service and of the competitive environment.

Furthermore, the project required interacting with the chef, the hotel managers, the PR and marketing managers, but also with maître, waiters, concierges, etc., and then presenting the results in front of everyone. In the last stages, the students needed to coordinate the work of 12 people. A large set of soft skills was required.

Even more, imagining a new concept and a new restaurant called for creativity and planning.

Possibly because of the level of challenge and out of the company culture and procedures, the business tutor interacting with the students, initially and in other steps tried to channel the students in the existing business development, change and quality management procedures, and to indicate them which kinds of analysis, and which steps they needed to do. All in all, the attitude was the one of a team leader more than of a commissioner with their consultancy team.

This attitude was contrasted by the lecturer and tutors, explaining that the students needed to design their own research plan, choosing the kind of tools and methods that seemed fit, in order to achieve the learning goals set for a Students' Consultancy. The commissioner readily understood the point, and let the students devise their own plans, although the fact that they acted somehow "outside" procedures and rules created difficulties at some stages of the analysis, and the proclivity to use the students as an internal team proposing them surveys and analysis they didn't judge useful tended to recur.

OUTPUT AND APPLIED CASE

The output of the live project were two reports describing the whole project developed and the different proposals of the two teams. The proposals were formally presented to the hotel and the chain management at the end of the Master course.

The first team chose a concept based on a sensory experience with particular emphasis on local products, believing that the peculiar flavour of an ingredient was also a way to get to know high-quality ingredients deeply bound to the destination.



Fig. 1. At the hotel. One of the two teams presenting their repositioning strategy to the hotel managers, the chef, the lecturers, and their fellow students.

The experiential dining associated to four tasting menus was also be devised as a way to guide customers' choices, increasing the restaurant's control on raw materials (food but also wines).

The other team chose to create a "story" to tell the guests in order to involve them in an unforgettable experience through

food and art in an evocative setting. Inspired by the executive chef's skills and inclinations, the team proposed also "Gastro-Art dining" or "Fine dining", to point out the peculiarity of the restaurant, the operations group within the team also focused on staff training - and a Floor training manual.

STUDENTS', TEACHERS' AND THE COMMISSIONER'S OPINION

In the end students found the live project a difficult experience but a very rewarding one: they had the chance to get into the restaurant management, take part in managers meetings, interview the clients, etc. The difficulty was mainly linked on the feeling that the commissioner didn't "trust" them completely and was willing to go its own way about the restaurant repositioning. Little problems emerged also when the managers tried to define the schedule of the interviews with the clients on the basis of their own needs and agenda, not taking into consideration the students' goals and research plans, and their own schedule as students (again they tended to be considered as "internal" resources"), or when they wanted to involve this or that group in their own surveys. Despite those small obstacles, the results were very positive and even surprising for all the parties involved.

Although successfully managed, the case underlines the need for the lecturer to fully understand the business client, its company culture and procedures, and how all this is going to fit into a live project. It also underlines the need to stay involved in the relationship between the students and the business: if let alone, the students – who are inevitably lacking some confidence - might easily think that what they decided to do is wrong, and be led to conform to the client's agenda and schedule. The same risk here illustrated about a hierarchical and a much organised company can be entailed in a manager or owner having very strong opinions and being used to be a team leader. This underlines the importance of helping the commissioner, throughout the live project, to be a "teacher" and the importance of cooperating with all the three parties involved in a live project, not only with the students.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

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Part Three

Introducing live projects within university study programmes.

1. Introducing live projects within university study programmes

University Study programmes provide a comprehensive, structured approach in order to deliver academic, career and technical education to prepare students for future employability options or post-graduate studies. More importantly, they enable student to acquire the requisite skills and experiences to build upon their future career directions.

Over the years, several studies, however, have demonstrated that in order to achieve increased employability options and successful career aspirations university graduates require a wider series of transversal competencies, especially those related to critical and synthetic thinking such as problem recognition and management skills.

1.1. Live projects within university study programmes: the possible typologies

As underlined in part I of this Guidebook, the act of lecturing, which is the basic teaching methodology and academic learning have their limitations in encouraging students to develop critical thinking, and management skills, as they tend to be based mainly on a reproductive learning conception – which focuses on the intake of information for fact retention (Vermunt, 1996; Slaats, *et al.*, 1999) – and/or a constructive learning conception. (Stavenga de Jong, Wierstra, and Hermanussen, 2006).

In order to guarantee students increased employability options, several attempts have been made in the past to adapt programmes introducing teaching improvement programmes (Seldin, 1994; Gibbs and Coffey, 2004) as well as forms of experiential education such as placements and internships, or the use of case studies, or PBL during classes. However, these examples are characterised with the formality of structured class exercises; and are carefully packaged by the lecturer, based on students learning needs during their degree (Ferreira, Lopes & Morais, 2006).

All these types of learning examples require no direct contact with live businesses or problems (in PBL the problems are more often than not simulated ones) and hence limit the student's experience and ability to build relationships with business clients as future employers. Structured case studies are far from the reality practicing managers have to face on a day-by-day

basis. In real life, business situations, problems, issues and realistic solutions are not so precisely built. This level of experiential learning lacks the more complex and cross-disciplinary, key managerial skills of recognition and definition that consider broader managerial perspectives (Hale, 1995).

Live projects can be integrated into a study programme to answer the need to get the students in touch with real live problems and real businesses or organisations. Summarising the direct experience of some of the authors of this Guidebook and other cases found in literature (Drake, 2012; Sara, 2006; Sroufe, *et al.*, 2011, Heriot, *et al.*, 2008), but also other known and explored by the authors (project Exprior at Ca' Foscari University, Student Business Projects and Business consulting projects at the EHL, etc.²) live projects within the role of students consultancy are integrated into study programmes basically in four different ways (cfr Hyde, 2007 providing a similar classification for experiential learning in MBA programmes):

as an independent unit/module/course which the focus and title of is the live project itself, so more on the “teaching approach” than to a specific content;

as an approach to teach/learn a specific topic (i.e. operations management), where the unit/course title and focus stays on the “content”;

as a “special project” or a class project, that can be linked to classes or to placement (or used instead of a placement).

Each typology of unit integrating a “live project” has basic common features:

- the teaching approach;
- the shift on learning goals as described in the following chapter (although not always completely formalised);
- the outputs and the role of soft skills in the assessment;
- the existence of a real commissioner and of a real problem/idea for business development;
- however, they might entail a different level of integration within the programme;
- different kinds of characteristics and syllabus.

Starting from the level of integration, “special projects” are the solution that can be integrated in the courses and classes but also stay aside from them. Special projects can be linked to and developed during classes, but also during placement periods or as an activity alternative to the placement itself.

² The authors analysed the brochures and websites of different European and American higher education institutions that include a kind of students consultancy in their programmes

Table III.1 Typologies of projects

	Level of integration within the programme	Changes in the syllabus of the courses	Role in the overall assessment of the students	Lecturer's role
Special projects	Low	From none to small parts	Small to medium	Supervisor
Live project module	High	Ad hoc syllabus	Essential	Tutor
Teaching approach for a specific subject	High	From changes in the assessment to changes in all the syllabus parts	From partial to essential	Tutor
Students' business projects	Medium	Ad hoc syllabus but often not as strict as other units	Various	Team coordinator and in charge of the results

For this reason, very often they are integrated without requiring a particular syllabus, or amending the placement or similar activities. The role “special projects” plays in the students' assessment varies a lot: it can be added as a bonus to the other marks, grant credits in the way a placement can do, but usually it supports and does not substitute the marks and exams of the traditional courses. The participation of the students is generally

on a voluntary base. "Special projects" are usually the way higher education institutions approach live projects for the first time, but they are considered a sort of “learning by doing” as a placement would be the shift on learning goals might not be completely controlled and formalized the experiential learning circle can happen spontaneously and not be specifically looked for.

So “special projects” can be live projects or simply a consultancy project assigned to the students, not qualifying fully as a live project.

Students' business project tends to have a strong focus on the business and on the creation of a higher education-business partnership. They are usually showcased as opportunities for the businesses more than learning opportunities for the students. There is less emphasis on the learning goals and more on the results for the company, and, therefore, on the lecturer's role. In this kind of projects lecturers tend to be conveyed to the potential commissioners more as “team coordinator/team leader” than a lecturer or a tutor, as this guarantees the final result of the consultancy.

Live projects can also be used to teach and develop competencies related to a specific content, changing the approach of an existing unit or in the development stage of a new unit, e.g. operations management, project management, research methods, market research, web marketing, business strategy, innovation management, international law, financial markets, urban planning, etc.

Live projects being a new teaching approach, it is too early at the moment to assess if they can be more apt for some subjects or some kind of units. In this stage they are starting to be used for a variety of subjects. It has to be said, however, that when live projects are integrated in existing units, two kind of assessment systems – and with them two kind of attitudes -can be observed:

- the unit's basic knowledge is assessed through a traditional test and the evaluation of the consultancy project provides another share of the final mark (in this case students can choose to participate in the live project and take a test on the basics or skip the live project and take a full traditional exam);
- the consultancy project and its outputs are the only components of the assessment.

This difference in the assessment indicates often how experienced are the HEIs in managing live projects: in the first case, there is a certain doubt that the students would acquire basic knowledge through the live project – or to be able to assess it. The doubt might arise from the lecturers themselves or from institutional organisation (evaluation or quality committees, faculty councils, etc.).

Even if the consultancy project is supplemented by a more traditional kind of test, in any case to have a “live project” as defined in this Guidebook it is essential that all the parts of the syllabus of the course (learning goals, role of transferrable skills in the assessment, assessment methodologies, role of the

lecturer, etc.) are revised accordingly. Otherwise, these kinds of projects are better classified as “special projects”.

Finally, there are “students consultancy” or “live projects” units/modules. These are units that can be eligible or compulsory courses for students of one or more programmes. The focus of the unit itself is the live projects and the experiential learning approach, and the training of the Students' Consultancy and managerial skills. In this case, we have a specific syllabus and content for this unit and the role of the project is obviously essential to the assessment. The next chapter is specifically dedicated to this unit and its features, as it is the basic structure that can then be adapted in other forms. However, it will be also underlined, step by step, what might need to be changed or adapted in case of units on specific subjects integrating a live project approach.

As for “special projects” and students' business projects, they can easily be transformed (or considered) into live projects as units, once the learning process and goals are fully taken into consideration and assessed and not let only happen.

1.2. Relationship with other programme contents

Through the integration of an experiential teaching and learning environment live projects and Student' Consultancy may be successfully integrated into programmes to introduce students to real, live management problems and opportunities, and allow them to acquire transferrable skills that, as underlined in Part I, are key ones to achieve increased employability options and

successful career aspirations (Katz, 1974; Analoui, 1997, 1998; Boyatzis, 1982; Bigelow, 1991; Entwistle & Peterson, 2004).

Although considered increasingly important for university education (Macalister, 1999; Browne & Litwin, 1987), it has in the past been assumed that the acquisition of these types of skills would develop in conjunction with goals for knowledge acquisition (Eljamal *et al* 1998), or could be learned on the job once a career has begun.

However, if some of the skills needed by the students are identified as non-cognitive, many (problem identification and problem solving, decision making, seeing a project/process as a whole, and visualizing the relationship of the individual project to the company/industry, etc.) are related to the ability to perform synthetic and critical thinking tasks. These are regarded as the most complex levels of the taxonomy of the cognitive domain (Bloom *et al.* 1954; Anderson *et al.*, 2001), and so it is essential from an HE point of view.

One of the most effective solutions for the design of programmes that help students to develop these types of skills is to use real business problems and opportunities and provide students with skills to perform as consultants, either as a team or as a single individual. The live project or Students' Consultancy approach, differs from other experiential learning experiences - for example a case study - as students are not required to solve carefully designed exercises (Ferreira, Lopes & Morais, 2006), but to face 'real-life' problems and opportunities, which are not as precisely built.

This specific feature of live projects, that requires the students to face real situations, and the nature of experiential learning more in general, entails that more than one kind of content, knowledge, skill will be employed to understand and face it. In a real managerial environment it is very difficult to solve a problem or undertake whatever improvement using the knowledge and tool of just one discipline. Marketing improvements can require changes in the organizational structure of the department, a different budget allocation, new people to recruit, etc. Therefore, whenever a live project approach is introduced it will have an impact on more than one course, even if the new approach is not implemented transversally as a specific unit, but within one specific course. The authors experience is that students will naturally look and ask for the tools, concepts, techniques, etc., they feel they need to achieve their brief at the various courses they attend. On one side this is extremely positive, as they will pay extra attention to what is taught, but on the other they can try and guide the lecturers where they want despite the syllabus and the plans laid out by the lecturer. For this reason it is essential that all the lecturers are aware of what the live project is about and which kind of content within their discipline it can require more. It is advisable to make some room for the live project requirements within the lectures in advance, so that the lecturer not involved directly in the live project activities can keep some form of control, or more effectively use the live projects as a lever to enhance the understanding of his/her own topic.

1.3. Involving your colleagues

To effectively manage and facilitate an experiential learning pattern, the lecturers and tutors should not only be passionate about their work, but also have similar experiences to build upon, and know precisely the dynamics and problems of the business sector industry. Ideally, the unit leader should have either experience as a management consultant, a manager, business owner or CEO. This is particularly important when collaborating in the presence of a business client. It would be an impossible task for the unit leader to manage three party's relationships (teacher-students-business client) if they are not accustomed to the background of consultancy or business and industry challenges. When this has happened in the past, it has often cascaded into confusion, distress, and failures for the students.

So, having decided upon the unit leader, it is equally important to begin the process of identifying appropriate colleagues - other colleagues who could also potentially work on the live project/consultancy unit. Examples of these types of roles are dependent upon the structure of the live project/consultancy itself and the cohort of students and programmes they belong to. However, from examples used within England it is possible to identify a number of key vital roles for other colleagues. The first of which is the position of acting as an Industry specialist.

An industry specialist acts as an extra call of support for the students when necessary. This is particularly relevant when the business client brief is relevant to the specific course e.g.

Tourism management or general management but the business industry itself is very specific. Recent examples in England include a client brief for tourism and hospitality students but with a focus on food nutrition and healthy eating and another regarding food shortages and alternatives. In these circumstances, an additional academic mentor would be sought. Their expertise based upon their research background and accomplishments who would spend an allocated number of hours with the students during their consultancy brief to ensure that they were carrying out relevant secondary and primary research and fully understood the specific dimensions attached. In effect, this academic is in addition to the attached academic lecturer for the 1-1 group or individual and seminar support.

Consultancy tutor/seminar supporters work alongside with the unit leader/manager. Their specific role and responsibility focuses upon providing an opportunity for regular support each week, in recent examples from England this comprises two hours timetabled per week. During this time, this academic is available to meet up with an allocated number of individuals or groups to help and mentor the students during the undertaking of their client brief. For example, the use of an appropriate methodology, brainstorm of creative ideas, enquiring the contact made with the business client and its subsequent progression, etc. In addition to which, this role also engages with the students in terms of advice and information that is downloaded to virtual learning environments e.g., Moodle. For example, this could refer to advice and support for liaising with the business client, particularly the first client meeting, how to behave within a meeting, taking notes and switching off phones,

etc., to more professional advice concerning developing and creating a consultancy report and a professional consultancy presentation.

This role would have regular contact with the unit leader and follow their management of the unit overall.

Other roles, which can potentially involve colleagues, comprise roles engaged in the process of marking assessments for the live project/consultancy. These roles are specific for both - the written assessments, for example, in English examples this would include a consultancy report as well as a reflective diary. However, other colleagues would be necessary for the consultancy presentation, which is marked by each individual assessor.

Lastly, a final role or responsibility for other colleagues is within the capacity of an internal guest speaker.

Internal guest speakers provide the students with the opportunity to listen to and engage with the lecturers as they recount specific journeys undertaking either consultancy or research work themselves or involve some form of live engagement with a business client. Recent examples in England have focused upon experiences of developing and creating new event concepts and the re-telling of a consultancy example with an airport.

1.4. Institutional barriers

One of the main problems in developing a live project unit or in integrating live projects into an existing course fully, i.e. changing the syllabus, might be provided by institutional barriers. In European projects aiming at transferring and adapting live projects as a teaching approach conducted by the authors, one of the difficulties faced by the receiving and adapting partners have been the requirements of the university assessment bodies or of the ministries.

The barriers to the introduction of a full live project can be divided into 2 main categories:

- barriers related to pedagogical change towards active or experiential learning;
- barriers related to or intensified specifically in connection with live projects.

These barriers can also be the main reason why live projects are often integrated in HE programmes in their underdeveloped form (special projects).

Every lecturer wanting to implement live projects needs to be aware of the possible – or probable – existence of these barriers, as well as authorities trying to incentivise new pedagogical approaches such as active learning. The lack of time or incentive in fact are not the only factors obstructing new pedagogies at HE level, especially at the institutional stage.

Table III.2. Possible institutional barriers to the implementation of live projects with the role of Students' Consultancy

BARRIERS TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING	SPECIFIC TO LIVE PROJECT
HE tradition	Very low control on content
No reward for the lecturer who applies it	Interdisciplinary—>reduced focus on specific content
Lack of information/difficulty in isolating the difference	Higher emphasis on teaching approach expertise than on the content
No textbook to rely upon	No lecture plan and continuous need of adaptation
No time for the change	Difficulty in assessing individual contribution
Increase of students voice	
Difficulty in measuring the outcomes	
Low control on content	

As for the first kind of barriers – the ones related generally to the introduction of active learning, the main in an academic context can be:

- a long standing educational tradition that it is very difficult to change;
- lack of reward for teachers who develop academic competence in education at the expense of biological research (cfr Thompson & Williams, 1985);
- lack of information about the methodology, and difficulty in understanding the difference between the complete experiential learning circle and the usual theory-practice back and forth axis.

As other authors who analysed the situation of pedagogy in HEIs underline, there is not much evidence of a change in the teaching approach - or in the approach to teaching - in the majority of faculties in Europe and abroad. This is despite the documents, studies, incentives, and grants provided by the EU and other sponsors (cfr Tagg, 2012).

Another perceived risk, which is shared also in lower grades of education - but it is more surprising in HE (Brownell & Tanner, 2012) - is the fact that experiential learning reduces the dependence on a textbook or a handbook. This is linked to the fact that lecturers or professors are not that supported in developing pedagogical skills, so they tend to rely to some sources they feel substitute a bit this lack. At university level the reduction of the textbook role might also raise doubts about the control of the content the students will learn, thus generating obstacles also at an institutional level, when it is time to approve the new syllabus.

Teachers in general perceive as a high risk also the increase of the students' voice in the classroom (Brownell & Tanner, 2012) and active learning is easily misunderstood as the students' learning what they want instead of what they need.

Another obstacle might be faced when the introduction of experiential learning is not linked to the will and interest of one specific lecturer, but is proposed as a pedagogical approach including more than one unit. This obstacle is the overload of time needed for the change, that has already being observed as one of the factors more impacting in the failure of educational improvement (Hargreaves, 2008; Le Fevre, 2010), as teachers

tend to react to important changes in their practice reluctantly, selectively or not at all (Terhart, 2013).

Among the various experiential learning methods, live projects are the ones that entail the highest risk - highly dependent on the students' own decision of which knowledge is needed to complete the brief, high students' failure risk, no textbook or limited role of the textbook (at least in the traditional way), etc. Therefore, there are some barriers that might be intensified or specific for live projects.

The first of these is that a faculty and departments might feel "threatened" if they perceive the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary nature of learning fostered by live projects as a way to reduce the need for their department-specific courses, or for some specific content.

If the decision is for the introduction of a transversal live project unit, the second barrier can be linked to the fact that the lecturer is not necessarily an "expert" on a specific topic, but on a methodology of teaching. To accommodate this and to accommodate a unit not linked to a subject and a disciplinary area requires a 360° shift of focus that is not easy (see also the following paragraph). That kind of shift might be even more difficult to pass at a ministry level, where research and teaching are often strictly classed exclusively on the basis of content, and there are requirements for this or that programme in terms of content.

Another problem, again also at the ministerial level, is linked to the kind of assessment and learning outcomes. Accounting for

what is learned in an experiential learning environment might be "elusive" (Hyde, 2007), but the learning outcomes of live projects are per definition uncertain, and they require to assess the development of managerial and soft skills as much as the command on the content itself.

In the process of assessing students' learning outcomes within universities, the choice is usually to evaluate on the basis of what is the easiest to measure rather than on what is the most meaningful (Penn, 2011). Universities and colleges of higher education moreover, often tend to pursue teaching goals primarily focused on analytical skills (Elijamal, *et al.*, 1998) and to overlook synthetic/critical ones. Again, live projects require an enormous shift of focus compared to what academy is used to and can be at the centre of institutional discussion.

Being aware of all the barriers described it is important for the lecturer/s or the head of a department/faculty willing to introduce this new teaching approach, because it can help:

- choosing the typology of a live projects unit that creates less friction (at least at the beginning), but without being forced to narrow live projects to side activities or to activities merely devised to attract a business client;
- devising a strategy for the introduction of live projects that can overcome some of the problems (e.g., informing specifically the other colleagues on the features of experiential learning and live projects can reduce the risk perceived);
- answering tricky questions or implied criticism, especially the one linked to the lack of control on the content.

1.5. Barriers related to the formal knowledge mindset

The institutional barriers discussed in the previous paragraph are more often than not linked to what can be called “a formal knowledge mindset” which tends to characterize many academic contexts.

The main factors linked to this mindset and impacting on the implementation of live projects are:

1. uncertainty about the learning outcomes;
2. professional identity;
3. ontological security.

1. As for the first point Grisoni (2002) has highlighted the uncertainty perceived by many academics considering experiential learning approaches. Some of them were unsure about the students' reaction - a similar lack of confidence in the students' ability and willingness to undertake live projects was faced by the authors in different seminars throughout the years and the continents when they tried to transfer the concept of live projects and experiential learning.

Another uncertainty might be related to the fear that this teaching approach does not fit with the course's content (Faria & Wellington, 2004; Lean, 2006). As discussed above, live projects and experiential learning have been adapted almost in every faculty for very different kind of courses - the main exception being language teaching, but the lack of information

on a new pedagogical approach tends to make it difficult to see how the approach can be adapted (Lean, 2006).

The perception of risk in some cases can be intensified by the fact that a failure concerns not meeting one's ambitions but the improvement of others (Cohen, 2005).

2. Professional identity is not usually considered among the barriers to changes, but the way professors, scientists and lecturers view themselves and how they define their status as professionals might constitute an unappreciated barrier to pedagogical change in general and to live projects in particular. As demonstrated by Brownell and Tanner (2012) academic training cultivates a research identity more than a teaching identity, and scientists are afraid to “come out” as teachers, as the professional culture of science - but this can easily be generalized to academia as a whole - considers teaching to be lower status than research. As changing the pedagogical approach requires time and training, they might feel that they need to choose between being a researcher and being a teacher. Thus the combination of professional identity and lack of training and time (Henderson et al, 2010; 2011) can lead people who should be used to making decisions based on evidence to ignore new teaching approaches even if their benefits are widely demonstrated (Brownell & Tanner, 2012).

In fact, research conducted among academics reveals that some of them think that experiential approaches are “not academic” and not suited to university level education (Grisoni, 2002).

Table III.3. Barriers to live projects implementation deriving from the traditional formal knowledge mindset

BARRIERS RELATED TO THE FORMAL KNOWLEDGE MINDSET	
UNCERTAINTY	Will the students like it? Would the students be able to do it? Does it fit my course content? What if something goes wrong? It will also affect the students
PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY	Teaching is not as important as researching Do I need to choose between a good teacher and a good researcher? I don't have the time
ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY	The traditional approach is part of us and our culture Does it mean my education was wrong? It always worked

3. The previous point is also the reason why ontological security can act as an important barrier to the introduction of live projects. Ontological security is the confidence gained from the continuity of self identity and of the social and physical environment (Giddens, 1991; Barth, 2007 as in Le Fevre, 2014). Any change to them does not only feel as a risk but as a loss (Le Fevre, 2014) and this is particularly true for schools or universities that period of life people tend to grow attached to, and in some cases are perceived also as strongholds of tradition. This factor, combined with the challenge to a consolidated professional identity, would probably never appear out in the open but stay masked behind the more usual - and apparently objective - factors

like lack of time, training, or incentives, but they have been hampering the implementation of a series of pedagogical changes in the past.

One of the aims of this Guidebook is also to help overcoming these barriers providing information, examples, and “reassurance”.

2. Live projects as a unit/module

The Masters' Group Consultancy units or Live Projects units are developed to create a unique and inspiring unit developing transversal skills and competencies through the process of experiential learning.

In addition to which, the unit may be developed in such a way as to be transferable as an innovative concept to other global universities and colleges of higher education.

Primarily, the unit is delivered over the course of one term, e.g., 12 weeks and the 13th week is generally set aside for the final presentations from each consultancy group with their business client. The consultancy briefs are discussed, developed and agreed prior to the 12-week period between the business client and the unit leader/manager hence allowing for clarity of the consultancy work to be undertaken by each group of students.

It is vital that the consultancy focus and consequent literature base and research carried out for each consultancy project is grounded in the discipline of the master's award and consequently is appropriate to the students' master's course title.

2.1. Setting the learning goals

The consultancy briefs are commissioned by both external and internal clients in order that students may be exposed to 'real life' business sector problems, issues and opportunities facing everyday practicing managers.

As mentioned in the first part of this Guidebook, however, **live projects are not effectively introduced simply by proposing to the students a consultancy case:** it needs a shift of focus for the learning goals: from more "traditional" academic ones to the acquirement of transversal skills, synthetic thinking, identification and resolution of problems.

Once working as a student consultant, the students are able to develop their transversal skill base including:

- group problem solving
- social skills
- decision making skills
- management of resources including financial
- influential skills
- using initiative
- exercising drive and determination.

The learning goals and assessment **are mostly different from the ones used in more traditional academic units:**

- developing managerial skills, such as teamwork, autonomy, communication, problem solving;
- operating within a specific budget and within a limited period of time, and demonstrating managerial competencies required for the successful completion of a live group consultancy project;
- choosing and agreeing upon the appropriate tools to be applied;
- formulating hypothesis, identifying problems;
- rationalising the requirement for collection and analysis of both primary and secondary data;
- justifying the use of appropriate planning, methodological, evaluative and presentational approaches to the research project;
- understanding and adapting to complex situations where there are no perfect answers, but strategic answers;
- identifying and acquiring new knowledge and information when needed.

Effectively communicating the consultancy brief, approach, results and recommendations of the consultancy project to both internal and external audiences.

Proposing original solutions and business development guidelines or products, so showing the development of meta-competencies such as creativity.

2.2. Content

2.2.1. The stages of the unit/module

A module/unit focussed on live projects within the role of Students' Consultancy commences with a couple of introductory lectures with workshops to introduce the unit, how it will run, etc.

During the second week students are introduced to an innovative programme, comprising a series of group management tutorials, discussion forums, workshops and directed study. As this unit is so different to the other more traditional approaches, students are provided with adequate time to reflect upon their own skill set and previous experiences due to the fact that each student will have different levels of competence and experience in the requisite areas. This generally comprises an informal interview scenario whereby students interview each other and ask a number of key questions to find out about each other. From this point, students are then in a position to develop a much more in-depth approach to their CVs encompassing their skills, experiences and achievements even for those who have little or no work experience.

During the next stage the student requires adequate time to familiarise themselves with the role of working as a 'consultant' with managerial responsibilities within a business rather than as a 'student' within a university. This is generally undertaken either within 1-1's with the unit leader or through social media or virtual learning platforms (see Appendix 1 – 'Hints and tips').

This element of the flexible delivery pattern allows students the opportunity to have adequate time to attend weekly supervisory meetings with the unit leader and more importantly to familiarize

and learn as they go along – 'experiential learning' the undertakings and daily skills required to be a consultant.

At the same time and as part of their consultancy teams the students must prepare themselves for a major part of the consultancy brief – the methodology element of undertaking both primary and secondary research on behalf of the business client brief. This ultimately will help to develop and support the group's final recommendations and solutions for the business as consultants. They will undertake extensive and in-depth secondary research covering background industry knowledge as well as competitor's analysis and strengths and weaknesses. For these purposes, students would utilize management tools such – i.e. Porter's five forces and the SWOT and PEST analysis, competitors' identification and analysis tools, etc.

Similarly, concerning the primary research students have a wealth of knowledge at hand to take advantage of including questionnaire design, distribution, and analysis. observation studies and mini case studies, benchmark analysis.

Once the secondary and primary research has been undertaken the student consultants are in a position to develop the solutions or recommendations which relate specifically to the business client brief. Again, management tools would be adapted and used including the following – e. g., the 7 P's marketing mix, Ansoff matrix, new product development, new market entry strategies, or something more consumer focused, e.g., new consumer profiles, identification of new profitable target audiences. See Part 2, chapter 1 for more details about the actual business client briefs.

Towards the end of the consultancy period the students will prepare themselves for the finale – the consultancy presentation, the consultancy report and diary. The presentation usually lasts for 20 minutes with 10 minutes for a questions and answering session. It is expected that each student consultant will participate and present an element of the final presentation for example one consultant may focus upon the competitor's analysis, another on the primary research, another focusing upon the final solution, etc. However, it is vital that the unit leader/manager is absolutely certain throughout the sessions that the undertaking of the brief, the research and the final resolutions are owned by all student consultants. See Part 2, chapter 2 for more details of managing stress, and conflict and emotion.

The development and production of the consultancy report must be of a professional standard and be ready and appropriate to be utilized by the business client, hence an emphasis again on the live aspect of the consultancy undertaking. See the paragraph on outputs for more detail, and see Appendix 3 for an example of the requirements of consultancy report.

MAIN STAGES OF A LIVE PROJECT UNIT	
1	Reflecting on your skills and competencies
2	Being a consultant
3	Research methodologies and planning
4	Solutions and ideas
5	Writing the report and finalising the diary
6	Preparing the presentation
7	Presentation and discussion

Fig. III. 1. Main stages of a live project unit/module

Finally, each student consultant is asked to write or contribute in writing a reflective journal to provide evidence of the individual and/or collective journey they have taken as a student consultant and how they have grown as individuals, etc. There would also be an emphasis upon individual accomplishments and achievements as well as an acknowledgement of the development of a relationship with the business client themselves. See the paragraph dedicated in this chapter for more detail and see Appendix 2 for an extract from a student consultancy reflective diary. The reflective diary can be

substituted by other kind of diaries, supported or not by social networks, shared work platforms, etc. See also part 2, chapter 1 to learn more about the relationship formation between and amongst the lecturer/unit leader, the student and the client.

It needs to be underlined that the majority of the content of a Students' Consultancy unit is constituted or better is transferred in the form of "feedback". As shown in the paragraph dedicated to the calendar, the content of many "lectures" is feedback itself.

Feedback of course is highly dependent on the brief, and on the methods, strategy, ideas, etc. deployed by each group of students to achieve that brief.

2.2.2. Content and the lecturer's role and preparation

For this reason, the technical content of a live project unit is never the same every year, and can vary for every group, at least in some parts.

Whatever the situation, as underlined before, some subjects are transversally needed, e.g. primary and secondary data and research, research methods.

One element to be underlined about those basic contents is that the Students' Consultancy leader might be required to recall them even if they are provided in other courses. What usually happens is instead exactly the phenomenon of divergence live projects are there to bridge, i.e. the gap between what the students perceive as pure theory and what they think is practice. Because of this, the students tend not to use the tools and

concepts provided by the other lecturers because they do not see how that could be relevant for their specific brief. It is important for a Students' Consultancy leader to be aware that he/she is there to find out what the students learned and understood just superficially. In the Italian experience live projects have been often used to "check" if content provided in other course or units was to be provided in different way. In any case, the problem is mainly due to the traditional lecturing approach and to a student's acquired attitude towards "theory".

Therefore, the Students' Consultancy leader needs to be informed about the content of other relevant courses even more than in a traditional lecturing environment.

For the rest of the technical tools and concepts, or approaches the students can decide to use the live projects leader needs to react on the students' solicitation. This implies:

- an update or preparatory reading about specific contents that might be needed according to the briefs assigned to the students - to be done before the beginning of the unit;
- an update or some specific reading to be done before each feedback session, according to the strategy, tools, etc., the students are using (especially if the students and so the briefs are from different programmes) a colleague to rely upon when needed for specific subjects or methodologies;
- a certain knowledge of the features of the organisations are working on, to be developed before the unit begins;

- the possibility to rely on the commissioner for some specific feature of technology or other aspects of their business.

This flexibility is one of the main difficulties perceived by lecturers who are willing to implement live projects. If it is true that changing focus and content every year might be challenging, it needs to be underlined also that the students are really motivated and this helps the teacher to have a better experience in the classroom and be more satisfied about this part of his/her work (in other words the final result should be to avoid the feeling that “teaching is the price I have to pay to be a researcher in the spare time”).

Live projects also work as a laboratory for ideas and creativity so some work can create useful starting point for research.

Commissioners and business clients are an active part of live projects, and this enables the lecturer to remain in touch with the latest business and industry trends and evolution and provides idea for further collaboration even on research: in the Italian experience live projects were developed often into proper research projects (neuromarketing, evolution of the responsible tourism demand, AI training, etc.).

As the majority of content will be transferred as feedback and even partially to an audience that has already developed some knowledge and instruments, it doesn't need to be perfectly structured and packaged for delivery, which consistently reduce the preparation time.

The lecturer doesn't need to be a full expert on every topic entailed by the briefs - the point of a live project is leading the students to be the experts.

Another point about the “content” that can make the lecturer feel uncomfortable is that in a live project the leader learns also from the students. Asking the students to explain something or how a specific technology or approach works or how they found out this or that is a common occurrence within a live project unit. It is also an essential part of the assessment. It doesn't mean that the lecturers are not doing their jobs, but on the contrary that the approach is working and the students are learning. It is also possible, when the mechanism of reflective learning is really working, that students extend their active approach to other units and lecturers if their content and expertise is relevant for their brief. It is advisable to “warn” the colleague in advance that their students are going to be particularly eager or informed about their subjects in order to allow them to lead the lectures and, if they are willing, to adapt some content.

2.2.3. Units/modules focussed on a specific subject but integrating a live project approach

In the case of units focussed on a specific subject but integrating a live project approach, the lecturer is required to partially mix the content described as the basis for a live project unit with the content specific for the course subject.

In that case, it is advisable to:

- introduce the main feature of the content together with the ones about the live project approach and to ensure that students understand what an experiential learning approach means, even more than in the case of the Students' Consultancy unit;
- rely, if possible, on other courses for the part concerning primary and secondary research;
- select, among the various tools, concepts, etc. in the discipline the ones that are going to be relevant transversally for the briefs;
- provide them according to the pace and time set by the students, not by the lecturer - if the students need some concept and tools the lecturer has devised to deliver later according to the initial programme or diet of the working flow, the lecturer needs to adapt, even if he/she thinks this is the wrong order or way to proceed.

The students are active learners in this context, so they will need to be aware of the basic aspects and put in the right direction, and then the lecturer can leave to them to deepen the knowledge, and evaluate they need the most.

This in an experiential learning approach so the students don't need to be provided with all the knowledge before this or that stage or before beginning their work.

However, the lecturer needs to reflect on what really are the competencies and skills their students will need in relation to the discipline and let them look for the knowledge they need.

The students will ask for the content they need and where to find it when they need it - this is one of the goals of a live project and a basic skill to develop. For the rest, the lecturer can let the students explore the textbook or other sources to find a solution to their own problems related to the brief.

The teacher should provide some bibliography that might be useful for achieving the briefs, but mind to keep different perspectives and possibilities, in order to avoid the use of the same methodology, not because the students decided to use it, but because they think this is what the lecturer wants.

If some colleague can provide a useful content it is advisable to invite him/her to deliver a short lecture or to give the students materials to help.

Much of the content needs will almost naturally be provided during the feedback sessions.

A point to keep in mind about live projects and content, is that one of the goals of a live project is to teach the students through experience - that concepts, tools, practices and methodologies this or that discipline provides are relevant and useful in a real life environment.

2.3. Setting the calendar

In order to more fully appreciate the schedule of delivery, the level of involvement and the different forms of assessment and marking, please see below an example of some of the contents of a Guidebook based upon a live project/consultancy unit and read through table III.2

This calendar is an adaptation of a live, Student Consultancy unit whereby students not only undertake a live business client brief but they act as independent management consultants working on the brief for the nominated client.

The training as such for this role is delivered via virtual learning environments as well as regular 1-1 meetings with the lecturer. It also relies upon previous knowledge and skills that the students have gained in their former units, such as methods of research, human resources management, business skills, marketing units, IT skills, etc.

The unit begins with a few standardised lectures delivered at the very beginning, which serve the purpose of an introduction to the unit for all students and is accompanied by the support of a virtual learning environment – e.g., Moodle.

The virtual learning platform can act as a vital component to the unit as it has the provision for downloads relating to documents to aid the students, or to provide hints and tips as well as linking to other websites, journals, etc.

2			The world of being a consultant. Client management. Project management. Students to meet allocated tutors. Allocation of client briefs/projects.
3			Working with external clients/developing professional skills. Session with allocated tutors – beginning of your journey, project plan and objectives.
4			Research/reports/Presentation skills/ making a recommendation, etc. Sessions with allocated tutors – managing your first contact and meeting with business client.
			For the next 8 weeks the 2 hour sessions are to be used either as a group tutorial with your internal tutor or as time to work on your project or contact time with your business client.

Table III.4. Example of a lectures ' calendar

Lecture	Date	Time	Activity
1			Introduction to the unit. Introduction to the assessment. Students to form groups, group exercises and challenges.

Table III.5 Example of an assignments ' calendar

Item	Assessment Name	Submission date	Group Submission
------	-----------------	-----------------	------------------

1	Business report	(TBC)	Submit electronically Via Moodle 40% group mark
2	Academic Presentation	All presentations to be completed w/c ----- Confirmation of dates to be discussed with individual group tutors (TBC)	Presentation to be undertaken by all students- marked as a group Handouts to be provided to tutor
3	Reflective Essay	(TBC)	Individual (submit) Electronically - Moodle and in max 1000 words

It can also link to Youtube™ presentations, which also help, in particular with the presentation assessment. Additionally, the virtual learning platform is a depository for copies of the consultancy report and diary to be submitted for marking and once completed will recall and deliver marks to the students.

The features of the unit are described here the following way:

- the unit has a clearly identified unit leader as well as (if possible) other appropriate tutors to help primarily with the 1-1 support sessions as well as any industry specialists;
- the unit is delivered at a fast pace of 12 weeks and then the presentations take place and the consultancy reports are handed in and delivered to the business client;

- at the beginning, during the first week session, the students are requested to provide an overview of their strengths and weaknesses in terms of their own capabilities and working in a group scenario. Following on from this the students then write a small biography of their previous achievements, experiences and skills. This allows everyone to talk and get to know one another which ultimately enables the students to formulate their own consultancy teams;
- during the first lecture emphasis is given to key issues:
 - o the professional standard of work that is expected from each group;
 - o the role of experiential learning within the unit and a discussion on how this differs from traditional teaching and learning methods;
 - o the unique opportunity of working as a management consultant with an appropriate brief and the impact this will have when successfully delivered on their future employability options;
 - o the submission dates are made very clear and are set at the very beginning and published both in the unit handbook and on the Moodle site for submission.

2.4. Outputs: reports, presentations

In most examples, there are three components to a live project assignment:

1. **Group Based Report**
2. **Group Presentation and discussion** (25-30 minutes)
3. **A Reflective Piece of Work or a Diary** that can be **individual or group based** but allowing to distinguish individual contribution and components.

The **report** (including an executive summary and references) addresses the aims and objectives in the students group's designated client brief (including both written and verbal instructions). This should provide a thorough examination of the areas specified by the client and agreed with the lecturer and, if there is one different from the lecturer, the group tutor.

Each student is required to deliver a **presentation** for the second part of the assessment. The presentation will be delivered as a group but members will give an individual 5-minute presentation and the overall time for the group presentation will therefore be 25-30 minutes. Each group member will receive an individual mark.

The nature or the blending between the academic and more business professional components of those two elements of the assignment can vary. e.g.:

- Academic presentation - to be theoretically grounded critique of any element of the consultancy process + professional business report;
- Academic report + professional business presentation;
- Components of both in both of the assignments.

To those assignments, it is possible to add also:

- short written intermediate reports on specific aspects of the wider research project;
- materials prepared and command of the discussion during the meeting with the commissioner.

2.5. Outputs: the diary

As for the reflective part, the students **account of their experience of processes involved in the project**. Typically, they analyse the dynamics of the group work, student/client relationships, the research methods employed by their group and the management or how motivation was managed for this project, etc.

That said, the nature and role of the reflective dairy can vary for different aspects, in kind and in its role within the assignment, being individual or group based, written or social network based, and focussing on assessing different aspects.

1. Produced by

- an individual diary
- a group diary.

2. Kind of support

- a written diary;
- entirely based on one or more social media dairies and sharing platforms.

3. Meant to assess whom?

- Used to assess only individual contributions;

- used to assess aspects concerning the team organisation, time management, etc. (this is easier with social media or sharing platform based diaries);
- a blend of the two previous elements.

4. Meant to assess what?

- Used to assess mainly transferrable skills and meta skills;
- used to assess a critical reflection and reference to the academic literature to support the student's account.

According to what the lecturer wants to mainly understand using the dairy, different supports can be more or less useful.

Social media or sharing platforms based diaries or a combination of both can have some advantages with respect to a report-like diary. They can also do partially or entirely the functions of the virtual learning platform.

There are some aspects to keep in mind when choosing the support:

- it has to allow the lecturer to follow the group activities and discussion and to easily reconstruct it later;
- the students must feel comfortable in using it;
- it has to allow quick communication among the group and between the group and the lecturers/tutors;
- it has to allow students to exchange documents, materials, etc.

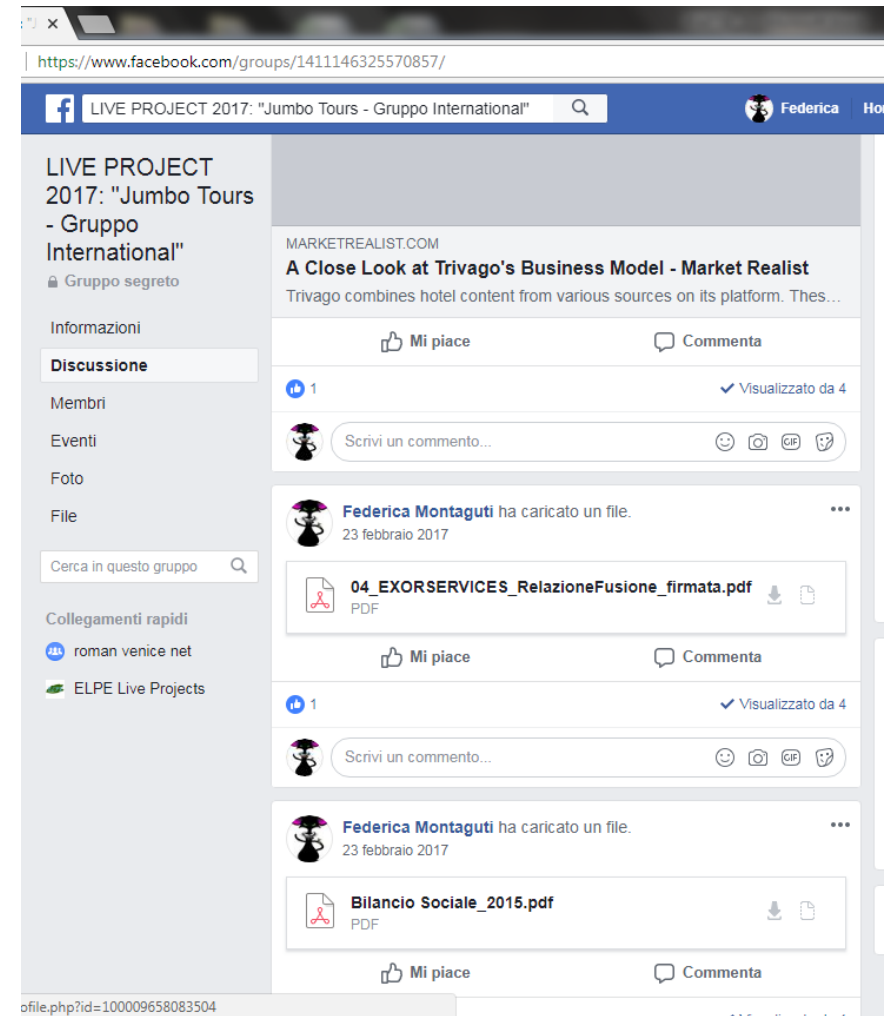


Fig.III.2. A Facebook® based diary

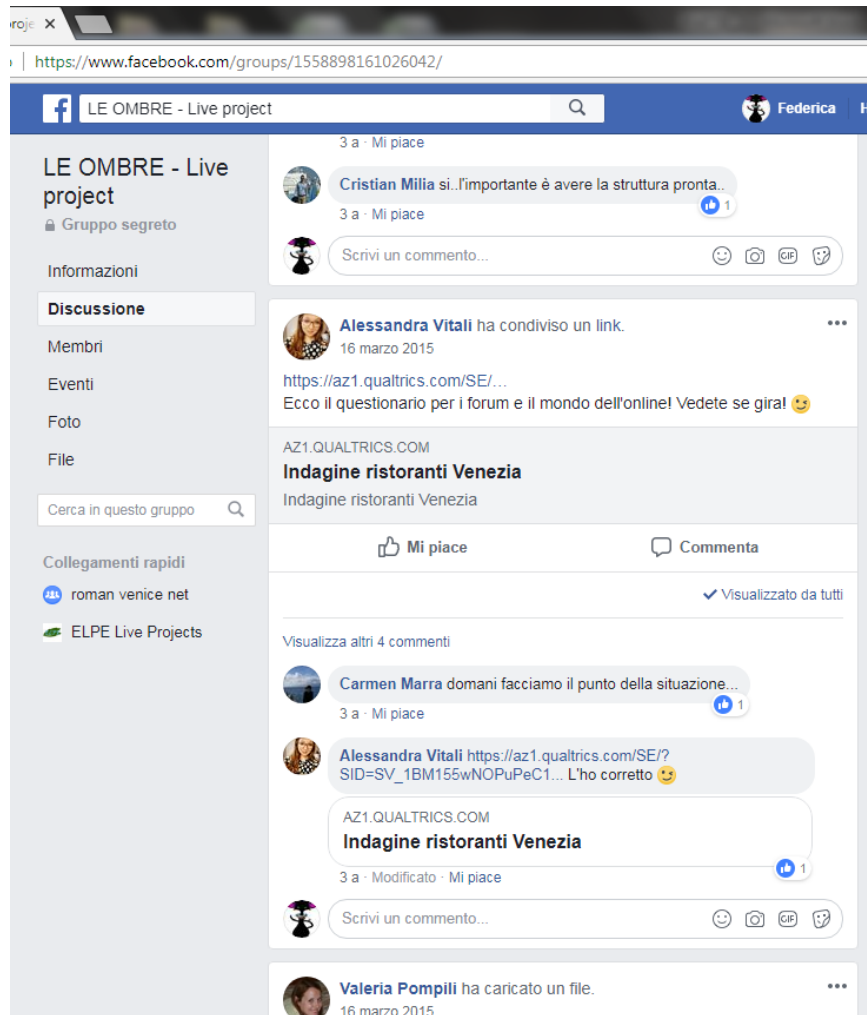


Fig.III.3. A Facebook® based diary

A social/web supported diary advantages from the lecturer's point of view are:

- evaluating individual participation, work and role in a more objective way;

- possibility to share materials and comment easily and promptly if needed;
- understanding how the group is organised and the communication flows;
- following the learning process step by step;
- reconstructing the learning process later;
- understanding promptly how feedback and suggestions are received and understood and what is their impact;
- reducing the formality of the relationships so that students' individual characteristics are easier to understand;
- giving the possibility to the lecturer to be considered as a team member and therefore better understanding of the group dynamics (leadership, sub-teams, etc.).

On the other side, the majority of the social media based diaries might imply a certain level of sharing the lecturers' personal characteristic as well, although it is possible to create profile or account specifically for this kind of activities without sharing any personal information.

It might also prompt the students to overstep the formality of the relationship and consider less the lecturers as an authority, but this is also related to the way the lecturers interact in non-virtual environments.

The social media/web based diary can be effective also in understanding which kind of literature the students are

considering and what they are evaluating to be more useful or relevant for their work, but if the diary is thought to assess individual reflection upon the literature the social media/web based diary is better if at least integrated with a report like a diary.

2.6. Assessing knowledge and technical skills

The role of each element for the whole assessment can be different.

A typical split is:

- report 40%
- presentation 40%
- diary 20%

The role of the **presentation** can be reduced **from 40% to 30%** if the two are more linked, i.e., the presentation is not different in nature but just a “summary” of the report. In the Italian case it is like that. It is not advisable to reduce to 20% the share of the presentation, if within it we include the command of the discussion with the academics and/or the commissioner. The role of the **report can vary between 40 and 60%.** The role of the **diary and/or the tutorial assessment can vary from 10% to 30%.**

Marking criteria for all three (or more) elements of the assignment should be described in detail and can be set within a marking grid, providing an account of how each category of marks can be achieved – including a failure (see an appendix unit of this Guidebook for an example of the grid).

In any case, the main role in the assessment of knowledge and technical skill is usually played by the report.

In marking the report, emphasis is given to the areas, such as:

- gaining an in-depth understanding of the appropriate industry and the current and future trends;
- in-depth market research that is appropriate in order to achieve the overall aim and objectives in the business client brief.

The elements assessed are:

- research design;
- application of relevant theory and concepts;
- (appropriate and up-to-date literature review) – if the academic component is required here;
- background industry research and information
- argumentation;
- justification and appropriateness of approaches for primary research;
- analysis and evaluation;
- organization and presentation (written communication, editing, etc);
- originality of the approach and solution.

The oral presentation is also used to assess knowledge and technical skills, but also transferrable ones.

As for the first set, marking criteria usually include:

- command of professional and technical language;
- command of managerial tools, concepts and languages;

- critical evaluation of relevant evidence in order to identify lessons learned and recommendations for future learning;
- organisation of the content.

Moreover, the presentation can help to complete the assessment of some aspects of the report, e.g., unclear parts can be the result of a poor written communication and not of a scarce command of concepts and tools, and the oral presentation can support in evaluating the weight of those two elements in the students' performance. It is used to assess both individuals and the team as a whole.

Before detailing how soft skills and meta-skills are assessed, it is important to underline that, for the nature itself of a live project – that mixes transferrable competencies development with the use of knowledge and technical skills as it is in a real life environment – it is almost impossible for the students to achieve the brief, write a good report and present it in a convincing way if they don't use transferrable skills. Therefore, at the end, the report and the presentation's "technical" results are heavily influenced by the transferrable competencies developed by the students.

2.7. Assessing soft skills

Although the report is a source for the assessment of transferrable skills or meta skills (e.g. the originality of the solutions, written communication, etc.), the main elements of the assignment that help assessing those skills, both on the

individual and on the team level are the oral presentation and the diary.

For the presentation, it is emphasised that each student must present a specific part of the report and the outcome of the consultancy brief.

It is vital that the group can demonstrate that they have met with and engaged positively with the business client. This is also evidenced within the collaborative relationship with the lecturer and the business client.

The presentation must be delivered in a professional standard with few if any notes; the students must dress professionally and show enthusiasm towards their results.

The marking criteria include:

- use of visual or other kind of aids;
- timings;
- attitude and presentation skills: attention keeping, non verbal communication, presence and self assurance;
- management of the discussion and especially of tricky or difficult questions;
- creativity: choosing different (but appropriate) way to present (rhetoric).

As for the diary, the assessment criteria vary according to the role it might have in assessing the academic related skills.

If it is so, the diary serves two purposes:

- focuses on the delivery and understanding of secondary sources and applicable theories applied (academic);

- must be reflective and discuss lessons learnt, problems overcome, difficulties faced and above all how they have grown as individuals whilst working in management consultancy (reflective learning, transferrable skills).

If the diary is used mainly for the assessment of the learning experience and of the development of transferrable skills, its role is to assess:

at the individual level:

- personal reflection of contribution to the project, to include individual strengths & weaknesses;
- role in the group mechanics;
- creativity;
- role in problem solving;
- initiative;
- leadership;

at the team level:

- autonomy;
- creativity;
- time management;
- problem solving;
- team working;
- decision making.

To achieve the final mark for this part of the assignment, it is advisable to mark the team first and then, for the individual marking, add or subtract from the group mark according to the criteria established for the individual assessment.

2.8. Tutorial continuous assessment

Beside the assignments, it is possible to assess the students' performance and development using tutorial continuous assessment.

Continuous or ongoing assessment gives both the student and the lecturer detailed up-to-date information on the students' development and learning requirements. It has the advantage to provide the lecturer time to implement pedagogical changes before the scores are completed (Esposto & Weaver, 2011).

This activity can be performed by the lecturers themselves or by the lecturers and the tutors if the course or programme involves this kind of figures.

This assessment supports the diary (or is supported by the diary depending on the role it is decided to give this kind of assessment) in evaluating:

- autonomy;
- originality of the solutions;
- time management;
- problem solving;
- team working;
- decision making;
- leadership;
- initiative;
- interdisciplinarity.

It also supports in assessing knowledge and technical skills.

Outputs such as:

- short written intermediate reports on specific aspects of the wider research project;
- materials prepared and command of the discussion during the meeting with the commissioner

can be used for tutorial continuous assessment, but this activity is mainly based on the interaction during feedback sessions and requires specifically observational skills and, if the lecturer isn't in touch with the students for a long time, to have a "face book" of the teams and take note about

- who among the group members presents or answers questions about specific part of the work;
- who is more in charge of coordinating the activities and usually is the one introducing the issues or the results or starting the discussions;
- who participates in the discussion;
- who tends to consider the problems as irresolvable or tries to have the lecturer or the commissioner to solve them;
- how the team members interact;
- how much they discuss matters or invest in finding solutions or ideas;
- from which disciplines or approaches they are taking the concepts;
- who is in charge of managing the relationship with the commissioner and the lecturer;
- how that is managed;
- professional approach;

- pro –activity;
- flexibility.

Although not always integrated in the assessment system, this kind of evaluation is possibly carried on naturally every time the lecturer interacts with the group.

Even if the lecturer can manage (in hypothesis) not to pay no attention to those aspects, experience tells the authors that they constitute an important part of the assessment by the commissioner, together with the final results and the solutions proposed. As the commissioner opinion is integrated in the final mark or the commissioner is asked to mark, these elements will be assessed in any case. Therefore it is advisable for the lecturer to perform at least some continuous assessment during the feedback in order to "compare notes" with the commissioner.

As some team member can be particularly shy, the diary can help to understand if a poor participation is linked to shyness or to low interest. However, the continuity of the assessment also allows the more introvert to get used to the lecturer interaction and so to show more about their knowledge and skills than in a one-shot presentation. It also supports their self-assurance and then their performance during the final presentation.

CASE STUDY 1. STRATEGIC BRANDING: A MODULE INTEGRATING A LIVE PROJECT APPROACH

Strategic Branding Module – Haaga Helia

Strategic Branding Module (course) is a third year module executed using experiential learning approach. Students learn how to make branding strategies for a given company (organization). The module is open for students from different degree programs such as Business, Tourism and Hospitality program, Sales and International Marketing and Visual Marketing. A maximum of 60 students enrolled and two instructors are appointed to run the module. After successful completion, students get 9 ECTS and course runs for about 4 months.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE MODULE

The module aims at increasing awareness of students in terms of how a company creates successful brands and how to maintain brand awareness. In addition, students should take challenging strategic branding projects from real companies. After completion of the module, participants should be able to work with similar projects in different fields and areas.

THE TEACHING AND WORKING METHODS

In the beginning, instructors introduce the whole module. Then the class is divided into different teams according to the number of companies that wish to commission tasks (projects)

to students. Each team chooses then own team leader. Instructors and different businesses, together with students plan and agree on a workable schedule. Using a project management approach, the schedule is broken into weeks and different activities and milestones are agreed upon. In addition, the involved actors agree on indicators and measurements to reach milestones.

THE ACTORS AND ACTIONS

Each week, there are strategic branding topics to introduce the branding theories to students. Instructors also work as coaches and give advices to each team in order to progress well. Each team starts by planning and scheduling own project. They set their goals and learning objectives, then work together to produce goals for own project. They then develop a theoretical frame for the project and present the approach and methods they use. After the whole plan is accepted, they collect data according to the nature of the project. Based on the results they then develop the strategic branding plan for the company. Different companies assist team working for them with necessary information. These companies give briefs and give market related information and feedback in order to facilitate the project. Companies may also provide for financial support to the team in order to carry out such demanding task.

Each team executes own project based on own plan and budget.

ONE CASE EXAMPLE

The first case is called NeXtension. The company is a Finnish SME located near Helsinki. It offers services related to hair and beauty products, mostly for women. The company faced a problem with how to create brand awareness. Two female students took the challenge and worked hard to develop a clear branding identity for the company. These students started by making a current brand analysis. They looked and evaluated the products and current customer base. They found that the visual identity was lacking and made convincing arguments why they should develop a new visual identity for facelift.

Before starting developing a visual identity, they conducted a research and used several methods for data collection: interviews, survey, netnography and benchmarking. In addition, they made deep analysis of customer insights in terms of needs, values, wishes, point of views and based on that could identify a specific customer profile.

They then moved into technical analysis of the color schemes and looked at typographical elements. Through the exercise, they came up with new and impressive elements that were used as basis for defining a Brand Persona. Then they moved to work on analyzing logo and re-inventing new slogan.

Towards the end, they created appealing advertisement in which they themselves posed as professional models. This produced a huge success and the company undertook to introduce the new look. Exceptionally, since the company was very pleased, it offered salaries to these two students and offered a job for them upon completion of their studies.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING

Several elements are evaluated: participation and activity, development of a good research plan, the final report and suggestions, self-assessment and group member assessment.

CASE STUDY 2. ADAPTING THE LIVE PROJECT APPROACH

A simulated commercial management case

**Strategic and commercial management of hotels' course -
Bachelor's Degree in Hotel Management, Universitat Autònoma
de Barcelona**

Teaching staff: Laura Lizbeth Martínez

INTRODUCTION

The “Strategic and Commercial Management of Hotels” course is included in the Bachelor’s Degree in Hotel Management at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). It is an optional training of 6 ECTS credits done in the fourth year. The training is related to the formation of business management (accounting, business management, etc.), and, in particular, decision making in hotel companies.

The course aims at giving the students a perspective from the point of view of the manager on the management of the company at strategic and commercial level. Teaching is carried out between two professors. The experience of the live project is included in the Commercial Management sessions (corresponding to 3 ECTS credits) that is developed by Professor Martínez. The focus of the training is practical and the theoretical contents are intended to be applied in case simulations.

OBJECTIVES AND TEACHING METHODS

The objective is to analyse, develop techniques and knowledge in the commercial direction of a new hotel and emerging markets. The objective is to work in a practical way: “there is a real need that I myself present to students” (L. Martínez, interview, June 13th, 2018).

The sessions are developed through the exhibition and debate of the main concepts and are deepened through oral presentations. During 10 sessions of 3 hours each, the teacher introduces theory to understand the key concepts (1.5 hrs.) and then the concepts are practically applied (1.5 hrs.) by developing a real project. This is the live project.

The group of 32 students is divided into teams of 4 people “to respond to a company’s need” (L. Martínez, interview, June 13th, 2018). The resolution of the practical case is resolved exclusively in the classroom. At different stages of the course, the representative (or the manager) of the company is invited to come to the School of Tourism & Hotel Management.

OUTPUT AND APPLIED CASE

On the first day of the class, the teacher introduces the students to the Live Project and to the company Curiosity. This company is dedicated to the experience of tourists through tablet PCs and digital screens. It also offers a service of Virtual Tourist Guide automated by GPS that speaks in different languages with a real voice. The virtual guide “Wilfred” is installed in a tablet PC, guiding a tourist to discover the city in a different way. When approaching each site Wilfred automatically tells visitors the

legends and stories of that site (audio format and animated videos).

At the beginning of the training, students receive information about the marketing problem that Curiosity has. I.e., the tourist and commercial circuit was not sufficiently developed. Three goals are set for the students:

1. To analyse whether the tablet PCs adapt to the needs of tourists.
2. To make an adaptation of the needs detected in the analysis, personalizing the product for the Chinese and Nordic tourist markets.
3. To market the product with direct sales.

In the second session of the course the commissioner came to introduce himself and gave information about Curiosity (how the company operates, internal divisions, human resources, technology used and real data transformation: “This made it possible for students to perceive the need to provide real answers” (L. Martínez, interview, June 13th, 2018). This is the time when “the students are very attentive, they ask questions, they are curious about knowing the company and they touch the tablet PC” (L. Martínez, interview, June 13th, 2018). They really perceive it as a real experience.

The commissioner came back for the final output of the presentation (Figure 1) and a general summary of the 3 objectives studied. At that time, the 8 groups had 15 minutes “to sell” the study: “They observed possible changes implemented and the way the proposal carried out. It is like 10 minutes of

gold! It's like a challenge. The exercise is based as if they were acting as the hotel's manager. Each group makes its strategic contribution” (L. Martínez, interview, June 13th, 2018).



Fig.1. Students and the commissioner from Curiosity at the end of the course (final presentation)

EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING

The evaluation of the Commercial Management of Hotels is calculated as an average arithmetic grade between the 3 obligatory activities that the student presents in the indicated calendar.

There is a partial evaluation for each of these 3 objectives. The teacher evaluates, for each objective, the content of the oral presentation, writing summary and participation (Figure 2). There is no exam; the Live Project is 100% of the mark of the

Commercial Marketing of Hotels. There is no alternative. Although whoever wants and/or cannot do the continuous assessment can do a single exam.



Fig.2. Students presenting in the classroom the results of the analysis of the objectives in groups

In the continuous assessment, assistance is mandatory. The teacher asks everyone to get involved in every aspect of the study. “They have to feel that they are part of a team. It’s like implementing a business strategy, there are no individual parts, it’s a set” (L. Martínez, interview, June 13th, 2018).

STUDENTS', TEACHERS' AND THE COMMISSIONER'S OPINION AND THE APPLIED CASE

Most students follow the continuous assessment including the experience of the live project (only one student chose to take the final exam). Student assessment is more of a benefit than a cost. The student’s opinion survey confirms this aspect: “These are 100 % recommended sessions”; “The sessions were very useful for implementing input into professional life”; “These types of exercises are great because they 100% support and inspire practical aspirations to be part of the professional world”.

In fact, although commercial strategies did not come out of the classroom, the presence of the commissioner at the final presentation was an open door that proved that the proposals could be implemented truthfully. In addition to the presentation, the commissioner had all the documentation of the project.

The teacher was also very satisfied that the objectives were exceeded. In addition, the format adopted on the course, developing a commercial management analysis based on a single case, was sufficient for 2-3 months. In a situation in which the duration of the training was longer, it would be necessary to introduce more real business cases. Not making this adjustment would cause tiredness. Consider also that the live project may be ideal for development with 3rd or 4th year students: “Maybe third-year students could develop a mini Live Project. Of course, people and business representatives involved in this kind of experience normally want real solutions. And the degree of maturity between the 1st and 4th year students is not the same” (L. Martínez, interview, June 13th, 2018).

According to the commissioner's opinion survey, the commissioner considers that the Live Project experience has been useful for the company (Curiosity): "It has been a very useful experience; both for the identified innovative opportunities and ideas and for the identification of weaknesses to be resolved".

As well as this, it is valuable that the student, teacher and commissioner relationship has been very positive. In this sense the commissioner highlights the importance of the active participation of students under the guidance of the teaching staff. Finally, the commissioner considers that it would be interesting to know if the students apply in the future what their contribution will be.

CASE STUDY 3. INTRODUCING LIVE PROJECTS: A CHANGE OF STATUS FOR THE ACADEMICS

International Transfer of Student Consultancy in Kenya

Live project development consultant: Susan Moulding

INTRODUCTION

An Education Partnerships in Africa project (EPA) funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, aimed at internationalising the Kenyan curriculum with up to date content and approaches. The emphasis was on transferring the innovation from the Student Consultancy unit established at Manchester Metropolitan University in England into the Kenyan university curriculum.

The Kenyan partners had little if any previous experience of teaching student consultancy and management skills in live projects. Similarly, they had no previous experience regarding the creation and sustainability of collaborative partnerships between academics and business clients and students.

Kenyan academics predominantly identified themselves as teacher-focused professionals within the solid walls of their establishment and its environment. None had any consultancy experience and only a few had some experience of a management role or entrepreneurship. In addition to which during one to one interviews a number of the Kenyan academics expressed their scepticism regarding the extent to which students had the ability to work as consultants and

advisors and how they could gain sufficient knowledge or confidence to undertake such work.

Interviews revealed that the Kenyan academics had adopted a more traditional approach to teaching and learning which had relied upon a set number of case studies or group assignments, which necessitated a pre-set number of questions with determined answers.

OBJECTIVE AND TEACHING METHODS

Kenyan academics undertook extended and intense training in understanding the concept of Student Consultancy, both in Kenya and in England. In England, the Kenyan academics visited a number of businesses who had previously been clients on a local Student Consultancy unit. This enabled them to experience the close, professional relationship adopted by both parties and the recognition they gave to each other.

The students as well were involved in in-depth training activities. Covering a number of management and consultant skills ranging from how to engage in a meeting, how to dress, how to chair a meeting and generally how to behave in a professional business environment. The Kenyan students saw the possibility of a Students' Consultancy unit as a distinct change of teaching direction and an opportunity to move away from a traditional learning environment. There was some concern however about the suitability of their tutors and lecturers within that environment.

EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING

The meetings, training sessions and visits enabled each of the Kenyan academics to be in the position of a mentor and a guiding hand for the students themselves with a new pattern of a working relationship within an experiential learning environment, and to develop their own Students' Consultancy units.

STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND THE COMMISSIONER'S OPINION

After an initial hesitation in terms of supporting and working alongside the business client as professional student consultant, during the focus groups the students were enthusiastic for the possibility of being mentored by a business manager/owner and learning from them directly as well as the lecturer hence creating a harmonious and complementary circle of teaching and learning experiences.

Particularly, they saw the working relationship with the business manager as a way to appreciate their business expectations for the future and how they could best fit and adapt their own employability skills for future employment.

Feedback from the clients indicated a positive welcome to a closer working relationship with the students and the potential for them to undertake a consultancy role. Feedback from 1-1 meetings also advised that the business clients believed that the relationship between university and businesses was very thin, and Kenyan academics reputations had lacked credibility

for some time. Therefore, the business was pleased to see the introduction of the consultancy unit.

As for the academics, witnessing the interactive partnership between English academics and business clients, and starting to develop their own live projects enhanced their confidence in terms of leaving behind the comfort zone of the Kenyan university and to step outside into the business industry world on an equal footing. Similarly, they were encouraged to develop their confidence in inviting the business clients as guest lecturers and /or external advisors or to be part of the academic boards and vice versa. The lecturers realised that mutual interest and knowledge particularly in terms of future employability issues is a strong base for university-industry partnership.

LESSONS LEARNED

The research findings indicate that a live project approach embraces the notion of change for the status of the academic; from a purely academic status to one, which equally focuses upon an alignment as a management consultant and advisor to an established business. The experience gains further strength through the development of an initial client consultancy brief whereby an audit and scanning of the business environment carried out by the academic to identify and agree upon live management issues with the business client. Hence, the often unpredictability of student consultancy experiences can therefore become more predictable and controlled as the relationship approach between the business client and the lecturer develops a stronger bond.

Clearly identified within the data was the element of elevated teaching and learning experience that the development of Student consultancy unit enabled: a number of complexities had to be addressed in order to support the development of the consultancy unit and the acquisition of necessary managerial competences and skills.

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APPENDICES

1. Hints & tips.

1.1. Communication skills – Listening skills.

As an adult in the business environment, you may have mastered listening filters effectively in order that your contact with others is both productive and enriching. The challenge is to analyse your filters and use them to enliven your listening powers in a positive way.

Here are my hints and tips for listening to and engaging with verbal information and for you all to consider and take action:

- Attitudes – identify your firmly held ideas that you have generated from University, home and life experiences. How do these attitudes influence your communications and listening ability?
- Assumptions – how do you currently make assumptions about someone when you first meet them? How do they dress? How do they speak/accent? Their age/ethnicity? – What impact do these factors have upon your listening abilities?
- Expectations – to what extent do your ambitions and motivations affect your anticipation to meeting someone and listening to what they have to say?
- Interests – are you more likely to listen to someone who shares some of your key interests and hobbies. How can you expand upon and develop your interests to capture more people?
- Memories/past experiences – identify things that have happened in your life which affect how you react to someone when you first meet them. E.g. a strict parent, a happy teacher .
- Physical environment – do you listen more effectively when you are hot? Cold? Sitting down? In comfortable or luxury surroundings?

1.2. Communication skills.

1. Effective communication will enable you to organise your tasks, decide what needs to be undertaken and who to allocate them to. Communication will also allow you to discuss why certain tasks should be undertaken and to agree as a group.

Tip – put everything in writing for sharing! (Make use of Dropbox and Googledocs.)

2. In order for the business client to take into consideration your advice as a group of consultants, it is vital that you communicate your ideas effectively to them.

Tip – make full use of charts/graphs/YouTube/podcasts etc., to express and communicate your advice to the client.

3. A key responsibility of a consultant is to motivate the business client to follow your advice and ideas.

Tip – always prepare beforehand everything you are going to say or do with your business client contact. Practice your conversations with each other.

4. Communication tends to have a continuous flow, which is managed by feedback.

Tip – Always listen and take note of full feedback from your client. Do not try to re-interpret anything into something else that you may wish to do that is not part of your overall client brief.

5. Before you undertake any form of communication with your client, take into consideration the following hints and tips.

Be clear about what you are hoping will happen because of your communication.

Define the key information that needs to be communicated into key words and/or paragraphs.

Be clear what action if any, the business client could take because of your communication.

Specify who needs to have any of your information and who it can be shared with.

1.3. Verbal communication skills.

1. Oral communication is flexible, quick and low cost.

Tip: Always follow up any verbal communication even between colleagues and friends, with some form of written communication.

2. Be clear to convey the meaning of your communication when talking.

Tip: If necessary provide further explanation in a written format.

3. Prior planning: - practice that which you want to say.

Tip: Practice amongst yourselves; refer to the tone of your voice and the timing and speed. Be careful with any word/phrases that you need to practice, particularly the pronunciation.

2. Sample of reflective diary entries.

Reflective diary entries – 1

(Male, 2018- leading international company in food bags and containers)

“In order to complete the project to a high standard, as a group there must be a good level of dynamics. As mentioned above this “close association” would be key to a successful and smooth-running project. To quote Friedrich Nietzsche “In individuals, insanity is rare; but in groups, parties, nations and epochs, it is the rule.” Group work rarely runs without conflict; however, my group IBM were able to navigate any disagreements and mediate them as a group, rather than arguing and causing friction.”

“The biggest issue we faced as a team was the lack of clarity in the “what I want” from the client, the client brief suggested we would create an “entry strategy” to the market of the client’s choice, however this was false as our client was already partially in the market, we had to decipher what the client truly wanted, and what would be most beneficial for them. We found a (fairly) detailed

report on the market, competitors and habits of locals (leisure) was a more useful tool for the company and this became our agreed client brief.”

Reflective diary entries – 2.

(Female, 2018 – local accountancy business specifically for hospitality businesses)

“The motivation of my colleagues and me are identified in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1965). I, Sibel and Sandip pushed us to achieve a Distinction in the unit. Other members of my team were happy with getting a Pass in the unit. In relation to Maslow hierarchy of needs, I, Sibel and Sandip were motivated to reach ‘self-actualization’ in order to meet our self-fulfilment needs. Other members were motivated to reach ‘safety needs’ in order to meet their basic needs. I came to this conclusion based on the contribution of work and the standard of work produced by my colleagues.”

“Analysis – Some of us want to achieve a good grade and some are happy with passing.

Conclusion – I would delegate the easiest parts of the project to similar people. Action plan – I would choose my team members more carefully.”

Reflective diary entries – 3

(Male, 2018 – leading hospitality provider)

“As Eckes (2002) explains in his work on Team Dynamics, the key factor to team effectiveness is a “full participation of the entire team” (Eckes, 2002; p.61). According to Eckes, a participation of the entire group during the decision making is essential to buy everyone in. This worked for the most parts of the teamwork, however, due to missing members during group meetings and some opposing ideas on marketing strategies, this was not

always met during the project process. If no agreement could be made between all members, the group used the Majority Vote to come to a conclusion.”

“Good listening skills are essential according to Berkovi (2016, p.185) for an effective client management. Before the meetings with the clients, the team met to decide on questions for the meeting. Moreover, the group decided to send multiple people with different tasks to the meeting: while one person was responsible for asking questions, another one typed down all gathered information and keywords which were helpful to understand our client’s expectations.”

3. Example of a Unit Handbook – 2018. *Unit leader – Susan Moulding*

Contents

1. Schedule (Key dates)
2. Assignment information
3. Introduction
4. Business research methods
5. Project plan and objectives (incl. ethics)
6. Market research, internal rules and expenses
7. Client report
8. Academic presentation
9. Reflective essay
10. Group Issues
11. Suggested reading

1. Key dates

Schedule of lectures

Lecture	Date	Time	Activity
1	Mon 8 Jan	2 pm	Introduction to the unit. Introduction to the assessment. Students to form groups, group exercises and challenges.
2	Mon 15 Jan	2 pm	The world of being a consultant. Client management. Project management. Students to meet allocated tutors. Allocation of client briefs/projects.
3	Mon 22 Jan	2 pm	Working with external clients/developing professional skills. Session with allocated tutors – beginning of your journey, project plan and objectives.
4	Mon 29 Jan	2 pm	Research/reports/Presentation skills/ making a recommendation, etc. Sessions with allocated tutors –managing your first contact and meeting with a business client.
		2 pm	For the next 8 weeks the 2 hour sessions are to be used either as a group tutorial with your internal tutor or as time to work on your project or contact time with your business client.

Assignment submission dates

Item	Assessment Name	Submission date	Group Submission	Weighting
1	Business report	Tuesday 1st May 2018 (TBC)	submit electronically Via Moodle 40% group mark	40% (Group Grade)

2	Academic Presentation	All presentations to be completed w/c -----1 2018 . Confirmation of dates to be discussed with individual group tutors (TBC)	Presentation to be Undertaken by all Students- marked as a group Handouts to be provided to the tutor 40%	40% (Individual Grade)
3	Reflective Essay	(TBC)	Individual (submit Electronically - Moodle Max 1000 words) 20% individual mark	20% (Individual Grade)

2. Assignment information

Assignment Summary

- The assignment (3 parts) is worth **100%** of the students' grade for this unit- **there is no exam**.
- There are three components to this assignment:
 - **Group Based Business Report** (max 15 pages) – weighted at 40%
 - **Group Presentation** of between 25-30 minutes – weighted at 40%
 - **Individual Reflective Piece of Work** (750-1,000 words) – weighted at 20% (individual mark)

Assignment Details and Instructions

This assignment is worth 100% of students' grade for this unit.

- Each student consultancy group is to produce a **professional business report** (including an executive summary and references) addressing the aims and objectives in their group's designated client brief (including both written and verbal instructions). This should provide a thorough examination of the areas specified by the client and agreed **with your group tutor**. **This part of** the assignment is worth 40% of the mark for the unit.
- Each student is required to deliver an **academic and professional presentation** for the second part of your assessment. The presentation will be a theoretically grounded critique of your consultancy process. The presentation will be delivered as a group but members will give an individual 5-minute presentation and the overall time for the group presentation will therefore be 25-30 minutes. This part of the assignment is worth 40% of the mark for the unit.
- Each student will provide a **reflective account of their experience of processes involved in the project**. Typically, you might analyse the dynamics of the group work, student/client relationships, the research methods employed by your group and the management or how motivation was managed for this project, etc. This critical reflection should refer to the academic literature to support your account. This part of the assignment is worth 20% of the mark for the unit.

The marking criteria for these elements are outlined below.

Assessment Marking Criteria (Group Report)

CRITERIA	<45%	45 - 49%	50-59%	60- 69% (Merit)	70-79% (Distinction)	>80%(Distinction)
Organisation Identification of the organisational context for the project, background and critical issues	Not identified	Loosely or partially identified the context. No key issues stated	Sufficiently identified context and background but lacks clarity in some areas Some recognition of key issues	Clearly identified context and background. Clearly identified key issues	Fully identified context and well expressed background. Fully identified key issues	Professional standard, outstanding recognition of context, background and key issues
Secondary Sources Consultation of a range of contemporary and relevant sources to provide a detailed view of the organisation and its needs in a clear and concise way	Not addressed	Loosely or partially identified, insufficient sources considered, not analysed or integrated	Sufficient sources considered, but lacks clarity in some areas	Good range of sources, clearly identified and expressed	Excellent range of sources, fully identified and well expressed	Excellent range of sources, fully identified and outstandingly expressed
Research Methods Appropriate choice and justification of research methods and their application	Not identified	Failure to identify, explain and justify research methods sufficiently	Competent explanation of research methods but limited justification, lacks clarity in some areas	Competent explanation and justification of research methods, clearly identified and expressed	Robust justification of research methods employed, fully identified and well expressed	Robust justification of research methods employed, with outstanding consideration of implications and critical reflection.
Analysis: Grounded and coherent interpretation of research findings	Not addressed	Partially addressed, although insufficient sources or data considered, not analysed or integrated	Satisfactory range of sources and data, analysis has some critical focus, competent interpretation of findings	Extensive range of sources and data considered and analysed, good interpretation of findings, some critical content.	Excellent critical application, evidence of breadth and depth of sources and data reviewed, strong analysis of findings	Outstanding critical application, evidence of breadth and depth of sources and data reviewed, excellent analysis of findings.
Evaluation & Recommendations Critical evaluation of relevant evidence in order to construct new perspectives, strategies or recommendations	Not addressed	Partially addressed, although insufficient evidence considered, poor links to weak final strategies or recommendations	Satisfactory range of evidence considered, some links to competent final strategies or recommendations	Extensive evidence evaluated, clear links to strong final strategies or recommendations	Excellent evidence evaluated, very clear links to excellent final strategies or recommendations	Professional standard, outstanding evidence evaluated, very clear links to excellent strategies or recommendations

Assessment Marking Criteria (Academic presentation)

CRITERIA	<45%	45 – 49%	50-59%	60- 69% (Merit)	70-79% (Distinction)	>80%(Distinction)
Organisation Identification of the organisational context for the project, background and critical issues	Not identified	Loosely or partially identified the context. No key issues stated	Sufficiently identified context and background but lacks clarity in some areas Some recognition of key issues	Clearly identified context and background. Clearly identified key issues	Fully identified context and well expressed background. Fully identified key issues	Professional standard, outstanding recognition of context, background and key issues
Reflection Critical evaluation of relevant evidence in order to identify lessons learned and recommendations for future learning	Not addressed	Partially addressed, although insufficient evidence considered, poor links to final personal recommendations	Satisfactory range of evidence considered, some links between learning and final personal recommendations	Extensive evidence evaluated, clear links between learning and final personal recommendations	Excellent evidence evaluated, very clear links between learning and excellent final personal recommendations	Professional standard, outstanding evidence evaluated, very clear links between learning and excellent personal recommendations
Presentation Quality of presentation - including structure, use of visual aids, timings and presentation skills	Inadequate presentation, muddled structure. Poor use of visual aids. Technical or other problems. Little evidence of co-ordination or rehearsal.	Weak attempt, unclear presentation. Poor or undeveloped visual aids. Presenters lacking in skill.	Satisfactory presentation though may lack detail. Acceptable if basic use of visual aid sand presentation skills. May lack co-ordination or be under rehearsed.	Good, interesting presentation. Strong use of visual aids. Clear presentation skills. Some memorable feature.	Excellent, involving presentation. Excellent use of visual aids. Strong, coherent standard of presenters. 'WOW' factor in evidence	Outstanding and professional presentation 'WOW' factor well in evidence

Assessment Marking Criteria (Individual reflection)

CRITERIA	<45%	45 - 49%	50-59%	60- 69% (Merit)	70-79% (Distinction)	>80%(Distinction)
Secondary Sources Consultation of a range of contemporary and relevant sources to provide a detailed view of the organisation and its needs in a clear and concise way	Not addressed	Loosely or partially identified, insufficient sources considered, not analysed or integrated	Sufficient sources considered, but lacks clarity in some areas	Good range of sources, clearly identified and expressed	Excellent range of sources, fully identified and well expressed	In-depth range of sources, fully identified and outstandingly expressed
Analysis: Grounded and coherent interpretation of research findings	Not addressed	Partially addressed, although insufficient sources or data considered, not analysed or integrated	Satisfactory range of sources and data, analysis has some critical focus, competent interpretation of findings	Extensive range of sources and data considered and analysed, good interpretation of findings, some critical content.	Excellent critical application, evidence of breadth and depth of sources and data reviewed, strong analysis of findings	Outstanding critical application, evidence of breadth and depth of sources and data reviewed, excellent analysis of findings.
Evaluation & Recommendations Critical evaluation of relevant evidence in order to construct new perspectives, strategies or recommendations	Not addressed	Partially addressed, although insufficient evidence considered, poor links to weak final strategies or recommendations	Satisfactory range of evidence considered, some links to competent final strategies or recommendations	Extensive evidence evaluated, clear links to strong final strategies or recommendations	Excellent evidence evaluated, very clear links to excellent final strategies or recommendations	Professional standard, outstanding evidence evaluated, very clear links to excellent strategies or recommendations
Reflection The depth of analysis. Support for statements. Evidence for arguments	Very basic, very limited, inadequate discussion of some of areas e.g. what achieved, what learned about business and what learned about yourself.	Very basic discussion of some/all areas, missing some depth or detail to allow a basic pass	Basic, limited but adequate discussion of what achieved, what learned about business and what learned about yourself.	Good and appropriate discussion of what achieved, what learned about business and what learned about yourself.	Excellent and appropriate discussion of what achieved, what learned about business and what learned about yourself.	Outstanding, professional and critical discussion of what achieved, what learned about business and what learned about yourself.

3. Introduction to the unit

Investigating Business Practice deals with the development of, and the theory underlying, the knowledge and skills involved with conducting respectable research and consultancy in business and **actively being engaged as a consultant within a company whilst at university.**

IBP is delivered in the following way:

Firstly within a short series of three/**four lectures** on aspects of business research methods, consultancy and project management. The intent is to provide an introduction to the course, overview of research methods, practical advice on research and consultancy skills, and project and client management. All lecture dates are provided in this handbook - **make a note in your diary now.**

Secondly, you will have an opportunity for **group tutorials, discussions and activities, etc.**, during the four weeks of your lectures. The remaining two hours per week are divided into time with your allocated tutor and time to actually carry out your consultancy brief as a team.

Thirdly, the **Business Consultancy Project itself**, carried out in groups of **five or six** supported by an academic tutor/lecturer. Projects will be obtained for you by the IBP unit leader: **Susan Moulding and will be handed out in the second week of this unit.** The client briefs are live projects in terms of dealing with **current and ongoing issues** within the business. These could be: -new opportunities, new markets/products, researching new customers, etc. Alternatively, they could be addressing occurring problems or dealing with complex situations which the management of the company requires consultancy assistance. Please note that they are **NOT artificial projects**, and real decisions/launches/cost savings/marketing plans/branding/events/new product development, etc., **are likely to be made by the business on the basis of your consultancy findings.**

During the first week, you will need to form yourselves into groups. If you cannot find a group then we will put you into one. **In the second week of the course, you will be informed of the project allocated to your group.**

You should then arrange an early meeting with your client, and you are advised to begin the development of your Project Plan as soon as possible.

From this point onwards, you will carry out your duties and use your skills as a business consultant for your client. It is important that half way through your consultancy period that you provide your client with some interim feedback concerning your project brief.

The IBP unit embraces experiential learning – for example you will learn and adapt your skills as a consultant as you proceed with your consultancy brief and will identify key skills, experiences, gaps, etc., within your consultancy group to accommodate this form of learning. Please note that messages and other useful notes/lectures, etc., will be

downloaded to your Moodle site by the unit leader, which you may find useful for your particular consultancy project.

Fourthly you will develop and create a **group client report**. This report must be submitted to your tutor for assessment (this part of your assessment of this group project is **weighted at 40%** of the unit total). Further discussions on your group report will be facilitated within your group tutorials and via Moodle.

The **fifth aspect** is an **academic presentation** to your tutor and other academics, conducted within a group framework. This presentation is **worth 40%** of your final grade. Again, discussions will take place within your group tutorials.

The **last** aspect deals with an **individual reflective essay** on some self-chosen aspect of business research consultancy process to be agreed with your group tutor. This part of the assessment is **weighted at 20%**.

4. Business research methods- your first handy tips!

- ***What your clients want to know; what methods will (and will not) get that information?***
You do not have to use questionnaires; the public are sometimes not involved, only suppliers or wholesalers; interviews with key people can sometimes be more effective than mass methods.
- ***Focus groups, interviews, face-to-face questions, e-mail, questionnaires?***
Be able to select your methods with logic, and defend them under investigation, with rationales based also in methodological literature.
- ***Select your sample for good sensible and (academically) defensible reasons.***
Random? Selected? Structured? Quota? Convenience? It does not matter which, as long as you do not claim the characteristics of one type of sample for another – be able to defend your sample, and also your approach.
- ***Design each research instrument with its analysis in mind.***
Don't end up with data you cannot possibly analyse in the time. Consult tutors as to how to design research instruments to facilitate the analysis of the data collected on statistical or other packages.
- ***For each question you ask, ask yourselves, 'why do we need to know that'?***
Demographic data, for example, is sometimes relevant and sometimes not: you can avoid excess data or embarrassing questions by rigorously questioning the need for specific data.
- ***Apply the questions to yourselves and to your tutor: can you answer them?***
There are questions which seem OK, like, "How often do you buy shirts?" But they cannot be answered unless the respondent is feeling charitable, and forcing the answers into boxes does not help.
- ***Prefer asking about past experiences rather than future intentions.***

“How often did you eat out last year?” will usually obtain stronger answers than “How often do you intend to eat out next year?”

- **Word questions according to the respondents’ language.**

Shoppers in a market were recently asked “*What do you think of the artistic selection policy of the curators of the town art-gallery?*” Do you think this question is clear?

4. Project plan and objectives (including Ethics Check Form)

A project plan will be the first stage of your work. You will need to agree this with your allocated tutor before submitting it to the client.

It details your plans for the whole project, and it should contain the following:

- **general description of the project:** this should make it clear to the reader what the organisation involved does, and what problem is to be solved by the project.
- **project objectives:** a simple and tabulated outline of what you intend to achieve (***not*** your personal or educational objectives but) for your client organisation by carrying out the project.
- **methods:** having stated what you are going to do, now demonstrate in detail how you will do it. ***You must select your research methods; you will eventually need (in your project report) to rigorously explain and justify your choice in relation to achieving your objectives.*** Take a hard look at time, resources and skills; and be realistic, for example, about public/business response-time to requests.
- **personnel:** list all involved, in group or in client organization, and **roles and responsibilities.**
- **difficulties and proposed solutions:** state what difficulties you foresee, and the ways you plan to avoid or deal with them.
- **schedule:** most importantly, you will find deadline dates in this Handbook: ***and they are absolute.*** Using these and other dates suggested by your tutor or client organisation, draw up (graphically, if you like) **a firm schedule that you can use to monitor and control your activities and progress.**
- **costs:** any cost implications of your plan must be carefully calculated and detailed. Any costs likely to be accrued must be agreed firstly by the business client
- **Ethics check form:** the University’s form is a very general one but you need to demonstrate that you have considered any ethical issues that may arise.

The Project Plan does not normally require conclusions or recommendations; but a brief summary of its contents can be useful. However incomplete, because of the budgeting implications, it ***must be submitted to your tutor before being sent to the client.***

5. Market research, internal rules and expenses

In running our projects we are bound by the rules of the Market Research Society and the internal rules of MMU. *Breach of the rules will result in severe penalties of marks, to the extent of **all marks for IBP** being withheld.*

Among the significant rules are these:

- You must not approach anyone, when conducting a commissioned project, without stating that the research is commissioned; i.e., ***you cannot purport to be merely students carrying out an academic project;*** and if asked, you must state who is commissioning the project, that is, your client.
- You ***must not combine market research with selling;*** for example, you cannot provide your clients with lists of contacts for them to approach, having carried out the research, except with the permission of the contacts.
- You ***must not interview children*** or carry out direct research with them, without parental permission.

Internal Rules

Equally, you must abide by the internal rules, as follows and as made clear throughout the Handbook; if in doubt, always consult your tutor or the Unit leader:

You must not purport to be anyone but researchers commissioned by a client; and if asked, you ***must*** state the name of the client or terminate the contact;

- ***In particular, in approaching your client's competitors,*** you must not claim to be, for example, mere students doing academic research;
- ***You must not purport to have any status you do not have,*** such as giving yourselves spurious company titles in correspondence except with the client's explicit permission;
- ***You must not do anything which would result in any damage to the client's or the university's reputation for ethical conduct in the business community.*** This includes the use of materials, information, skills etc. for competitive organisations during the rest of your time at university, ***including your placement or your final year.***

In its Vision, the University aims to “*behave professionally and ethically in all (its) activities*”. If you have any concerns about the ethical implications of your project or your intended activities please discuss these with your tutor. The University's ethics protocol can be found on the MMU website. **You should submit a copy of the University's ethics check form with your project plan.** This needs to be signed by your tutor.

6. Business client report

You need to produce a report addressing the questions in your group's designated client brief (including both written and verbal instructions). This should provide a thorough examination of the aims and objective specified by the client and agreed with your group tutor. **This report should be written for the client to read.** A full statement of the research methods, findings and recommendations should be provided, in accordance with the specified brief.

Reports will vary according to project and thus **there is no maximum word count**. However, as a general guide, your report should include a statement of objectives, research methods, findings, solutions and recommendations/answers to your aims and objectives conclusions and recommendations. You may also add an 'Executive Summary', comprising a brief summary of the contents of your report, placed at the start of the document. The recommendations could also include an **implementation plan and a full statement of the likely costs of your proposals**, as required. You should include your Project Objectives and Plan (submitted to your group tutor) as an appendix to the report.

The marking scheme for the client report is shown earlier in this handbook. Your group's client report will be assessed using the following criteria:

- your understanding of the client's brief;
- the content of the report;
- quality of analysis;
- presentation.

The client report will receive a **single group** mark from the assessors.

Your group's client report should be submitted **electronically** (via Moodle) **and in hard copy**. Penalties for lateness will be applied.

7. Academic presentation

The second part of your assessment for the unit is an academic presentation. The presentation will be delivered as a group but members will give an **individual five-minute presentation** and each group member will receive an individual mark.

The presentation should be a **theoretically** grounded critique of any element of the consultancy process and *may* include: justification for your research methods, client relationship, group forming, etc (this is not an exhaustive list). You should be able to give a comprehensive defence and

justification of the area being presented and the aims and objectives and how matters arising throughout the process were managed.

You should coordinate with your tutor who will inform you of the time and location of the presentation. The overall session should take approximately 60 minutes. This will allow five minutes for each individual and time for questions from the tutors. The external client may also wish to attend but will not mark the students.

Your presentation will be assessed using the following criteria:

- the quality of the presentation materials;
- your knowledge of the subject area;
- defence and justification of your research area;
- clarity of delivery.

8. Reflective essay (weighting 20% individual mark)

This is an individual piece of work (maximum 1000 words). Providing a reflective account of your experience of processes involved in the client project. This needs to be a reflection on the **processes**, not on your own performance.

Typically, you might analyse the dynamics of the group work, client relationships, the research methods employed by your group and the management of this project. **Your essay should focus on a different aspect of the process than you discussed during your academic presentation.** This critical reflection should refer to the academic literature to support your account.

Your reflective essay will be assessed using the following criteria:

- your understanding of the question;
- the academic content;
- quality of reflection;
- presentation.

You should refer to your group tutor for guidance on this assignment.

10.Suggested Reading

Books:

Biggs, D. (2010). *Management consulting: a guide for students*, Andover: South-Western Cengage Learning.

Bryman, A. & Bell, E., (2011). *Business Research Methods (3rd edn)*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Buchanan, D. A. & Huczynski, A. A. (2013). *Organizational Behaviour: an introductory text (8th edn)*. London: Prentice Hall.

Cottrell, S. M. (2014). *Dissertations and project reports: A step by step guide*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. & Jackson, P. (2012). *Management Research: an introduction (4th edn)*. London: Sage.

Gardiner, P. D. (2005). *Project Management: a Strategic Planning Approach*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Saunders, M. & Lewis, P. (2012). *Doing Research in Business and Management: An essential guide to planning your project*. London: FT Prentice Hall.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., (2012). *Research Methods for Business Students (6th edn)*, London: FT Prentice Hall.

Wickham P. A. & Wilcock, J. (2012), *Management Consulting: Delivering an Effective Project (4th edn)*, London: FT Prentice Hall.

Journals:

Various - depending on project and topics covered.

Websites:

Chartered Management Institute (CMI): www.managers.org.uk

Other websites - as identified by students and tutors in relevant areas.