Chapter 3
Upskilling the Workforce:
Live Projects and Business Undergraduates

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the use of the live project (LP) as a context within which to develop the employability skills of undergraduate business students. Learners worked in partnership with businesses to solve a real business problem. Working in small groups, guided by their business partner, students developed an array of skills, such as team working, communication, problem-solving, time management, organisational skills, and critical thinking. This type of authentic learning provides an environment where students feel confident to apply their knowledge and skills. By offering a description of the student journey through the LP, this chapter contributes to existing knowledge by explaining a learning environment which places the learner in an authentic situation. The contribution made by the critical description given in this chapter will add to existing knowledge around the concept of live project and the benefits gained by both learners and business clients.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a view from two professional practitioners who are working in a Higher Education Institution in the UK. It has been found that more than half of UK graduates do not pursue a career in their field of study due to difficulties finding a job in their chosen industry (Garner, 2014). Interestingly, not having the essential work experience and necessary skills were identified as being the biggest barrier when looking for apprenticeships and jobs among university students (Prospects, 2021. Therefore, it becomes clear, as higher education practitioners, we need to provide focussed and functional skills development and the Live Project is a creative way to address this issue (Panigrahi, 2023)

The chapter offers practitioners' reflection and describes an innovative approach to developing professional skills in undergraduate business students - the Live Project. This unique perspective allows for an interpretation to be given of preparing students for their future careers in the business sector where a high value is placed on practical application of knowledge, possession of a relevant skill set and recent workplace experience (Panigrahi, 2023). Presented as a holistic solution to providing an authentic learning experience to students, experiential learning (in the shape of the LP) is put forward as an effective way to position business graduates to take their place in the modern workforce (Leal-Rodriguez and Albort-Morant, 2019).

With an objective to describe the benefits of the LP as an authentic learning pedagogical strategy, the chapter contributes to knowledge building around the concept of growing an understanding of collaboration between external organisations and the university. With a goal of bringing real-time experience and skills development together to support learning taking place on campus, academic institutions globally can benefit from this scholarship and make informed choices that can change the present and future course of higher education provision. The narrative here blends with the aim of the book as the chapter provides knowledge upon which foundational changes could be made to programmes of study for business students.

This chapter draws on literature around experiential learning, namely - pedagogy, practice, process, research and reflection - with an overall aim of providing educators with points on which to reflect and offering signposting which will allow them to develop their own pedagogical approaches and frameworks.

Purpose of this Chapter

This study aims to explore experiential learning in the context of the Higher Education Institution (HEI) setting for undergraduate business students. The chapter is intended to inform practitioners in the area of teaching and learning in using their universities' existing networks to facilitate real business problems for the students.

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