

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING IN THE MARKETING PROGRAMME AT THE CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, FREE STATE, FREE STATE

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ABSTRACT

The Marketing programmes at universities of technology are of particular importance to all business firms and even non-profit organisations. In order for students, as potential employees, to keep ahead of new developments and trends in the marketing environment, it is important that a work-integrated learning component should be incorporated in the Marketing programme. The Marketing programme at the CUT does not include any credit-bearing practical component (for example a work-integrated module). The purpose of this article is to provide a useful guide for marketing educators in the development of a work-integrated learning programme. This study was based on a qualitative case study research design. Nine interview schedules were distributed, via e-mail, to the programme heads of the Marketing programmes at universities of technology, as well as the CUT's Hotel and Tourism Management programmes. Several work-integrated learning documents and practices of the relevant departments at the CUT and other universities of technology were scrutinised and compared. From the responses it became clear that it is important for the institution to recruit suitable employers for the work-integrated learning programme in Marketing. Students and employers should comprehensively be prepared for the work-integrated learning process in order to achieve the specific outcomes as prescribed. These outcomes should be stipulated in the work-integrated learning manual of the Marketing programme. The students should be monitored on a continuous basis by providing them with a logbook and by submitting reports on their experiences. Assessment forms should be compiled and included into the Marketing work-integrated learning manual. The employers should be provided with assessment forms to assess the students on their performance. All these aspects should be addressed with the development of the Marketing work-integrated learning manual.

Key words: Work-integrated learning; Marketing programme

1. INTRODUCTION

Today's students want to be more engaged in their learning experiences. One-way lectures, rote memorisation and the accumulation of isolated facts and terms are regarded as tedious and boring.

The latter can be seen as passive learning methods, which do not facilitate critical thinking, leadership skills, problem-solving and communication skills which may be desired by the Marketing industry (Munoz, 2008:214). Marketing courses have been taught for almost 100 years at various institutions of higher education and has faced numerous changes and challenges. Marketing students encounter a business world today that requires flexibility in the face of challenges and opportunities. Educators need to provide opportunities to students to develop marketing knowledge and workplace skills by exposing students to more than lectures (Laverie, 2006:59).

A prevalence of marketing education literature in the 1990's suggests the increasing popularity of work-integrated learning (Frontczak, 1998:25). The move from traditional, theoretical, passive, knowledge-transfer approach to an experiential, interactive method of learning has become the norm for marketing educators. Work-integrated learning can be a powerful way to develop and involve students in higher order thinking.

The purpose of this article is to provide a useful guide for marketing educators in the development of an work-integrated learning programme.

2. DEFINITION OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Work-integrated learning can be thought of as learning by doing and by experience. The term describes the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984:38). Students are directly exposed to real life incidents and people, and become involved in activities that simulate real activities or people. Learning occurs when students participate in these activities and critically look back on the activity to reflect on learning and feelings, draw useful insight from analysis and apply it to new situations (Evans & Lang, 2006:380). Students become engaged in ways that are far superior to information delivered in lectures or read in textbooks.

Work-integrated learning is an essential component of all career and business education. Students have to leave marketing programmes with the knowledge and skills that are directly transferable to the business world.

A number of universities of technology programmes make provision for an work-integrated learning component, either through work or community placements. Students are prepared for a specific profession or vocation through the work-integrated learning process and to become responsible citizens. Students have to be developed holistically and it is required from them to demonstrate certain life-skills, which will not only enhance their learning, but will also ensure that these skills are transferable to their private lives. Therefore work-integrated learning plays a major role in ensuring that students acquire the critical cross-field outcomes as required by the NQF (National Qualifications Framework) (SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority), 2007:5;23).

According to SAQA, (2007:24) the critical cross-field outcomes must be included and assessed in each qualification. Some of these cross-field outcomes are as follows:

- Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation or community;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation;
- Contribute to the full personal development of each student and the social and economic development of the society at large, by making it the underlying intention of any programme of learning to make an individual aware of the importance of (Williams, Beard & Rymer, 1991:50):
 - i) reflecting on and exploring a variety of strategies to learn more effectively;
 - ii) participating as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities;
 - iii) being culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts (Williams, Beard & Rymer, 1991:50).

The programme-specific mechanisms of how work-integrated learning will take place, how it should be assessed and recorded should be documented. Therefore the necessary administrative infrastructures and procedures should be implemented (CTM (Committee for Tutorial Matters), 2000a:4).

3. BENEFITS OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Work-integrated learning is any co-operative venture between an organisation, a student and an academic institution, which form the three partners in the co-operative education process. Many benefits are gained by all the above-mentioned partners with the implementation of an work-integrated learning programme, which includes:

3.1 Employer benefits

The work-integrated learning programme contributes to the human resource strategy of the company as it identifies and develops future employees. It also provides additional assistance at peak times of the year by the improvement of staff efficiency. The relationship between organisations and universities of technology are strengthened and lead to improved career-oriented education as organisations contribute to curriculum design (Braunstein & Loken, 2004:244).

3.2 Student benefits

“Real life” experiences are gained by students. Their studies become more meaningful as they comprehend the relationship between theory and practice. Students gain practical experience during their studies for a qualification and therefore are provided with opportunities to sample career options. Growth in maturity, self-awareness and confidence are experienced by students. Better human relations are developed by students when they are working with people of different backgrounds and disciplines (Dressler & Keeling, 2004:226-228). Students' interpersonal communication, as well as problem-solving skills are developed. The cooperation of students enhances listening, and critical thinking skills are promoted as students share ideas and listen to the ideas of others (Anselmi & Frankel, 2004:170).

3.3 Benefits to Higher Education institutions

Academic staff has access to contemporary work practices and new developments in the industry by maintaining close links with the industry. The curricula are constantly updated and serve the requirements of the employment sector. Lecturers are professionally developed through the coaching and mentoring of students in the industry (Weisz & Chapman, 2004:247-249). Work-integrated learning does not only produce an able workforce, but reinforces the link between the higher education institution, and employers and provides access to on-the-job earnings. It is an effective means of developing a nation's human resources and reducing training costs/the lag time between hiring and productivity and supervisory time. With these benefits in mind, it is clear that it may be imperative for students to undergo work-integrated learning to ensure that they become employable and productive citizens of the country. It also contributes to the attainment of a human resources development strategy and economic growth objectives of South Africa (Engelbrecht, 2003:5).

4. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF BEST PRACTICE IN WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Wessels (2005:40) states that the factors that may be considered as the key aspects with the implementation of a good work-integrated learning programme include: The preparation of the work-integrated learning environment (students and employers); the placement of students; mentoring and supervision of students in the workplace; the facilitation of reflection of experiences of students to optimise the learning process; and the assessment of learning of students derived from the experiential placement. The above-mentioned aspects are further discussed as follows:

4.1 The preparation for the work-integrated learning environment

Both the students and the employers should be prepared.

4.1.1 Students

According to Engelbrecht (2003:140), students need to be fully prepared in terms of expectations in the workplace and of the higher education institution. Prior to placements at companies (work-integrated learning environment), information sessions and a work-integrated learning period per week or month should be offered to students to clarify expectations of the Marketing industry and employers. These information sessions might cover aspects such as what may be expected from students in terms of working hours, dress code, attitude, resumé writing, cover letter writing, interview skills and business practices. Engelbrecht (2003:140) also states that it is important that students need to know when reports should be submitted in accordance with clear criteria and how they will be assessed in terms of requirements set for work-integrated learning for the instructional programme. A study guide, logbook or guidelines for work-integrated learning are thus essential (Mcrae & Baldwin, 2004:133).

It is important that students should be fully prepared in order for them to know what is expected from them by the academic institution and the employer in order to succeed in the work-integrated learning programme (Mcrae & Baldwin, 2004:133).

4.1.2 Employers

Wessels (2005:45) stated that employers should be approved to ensure that they have the required infrastructure, staff and training programme to meet the requirements set for work-integrated learning. Therefore personal visits to these employers are essential to determine their suitability and to establish good relationships with them. Employers play an important role in the evaluation of students therefore they will also need clear guidelines in terms of their involvement and responsibilities through the whole process.

4.2 Placement of students for work-integrated learning

The placement of students entails the act of creating opportunities (training opportunities, part-time employment, or full-time employment) that did not exist, or whose existence was not previously known to the institution. The placement process starts after the group orientations mentioned above (SASCE (South African Society for Co-operative Education), 2007:45).

According to Mcrae and Baldwin (2004:134), typical placement objectives might be to provide students with practical experience in the application and usefulness of knowledge gained in their academic studies; to develop students' personal skills such as planning, communicating, analysing and solving of problems, contributing in a team or group environment and responding to leadership; and to ensure that the students learn as much as possible about the organisation in which they are placed.

Employer involvement in the work-integrated learning process is important, and both the needs for co-operative education of the organisation, the educational institution, and the student, should be met in order to maximise its value (Engelbrecht, 2003:146).

Mcrae and Baldwin (2004:132) recommend that students should be placed from within the faculties, or must find placement opportunities themselves, as part of the work-integrated learning experience where assistance cannot be provided by the co-operative education unit due to time, infrastructure and capacity constraints. Programmes, where students are allowed to find their own placement, are doomed to difficulties and failure and often become, in reality, not work-integrated learning, but just plain work experience plans (SASCE, 2007:50).

4.2.1 Placement positions

Although the same conditions apply to both full-time employees at organisations and students in work-integrated learning placements, the students cannot replace full-time employees. A problem is that students are not sure of a job offering at the end of the training period and they are also not entitled to a salary, although some organisations do pay a nominal allowance to assist the students. According to CTM (2000b:27) the following factors should be considered when selecting suitable work-integrated learning situations:

- The placement position should provide experience in occupations that require both skills and knowledge.
- The placement position should be relevant to the programme outcomes.
- The placement position should provide a wide variety of direct experiences and should not only be routine experiences of a repetitive nature.
- The placement position should be supervised by a person who is competent in the skills and technical aspects of the occupation and who should be interested and eager to assist in the training programme.
- The organisation should have a record of a safe working environment.
- The organisation should also have a reputation of conducting ethical business practices in the community.
- The hours in the placement position should be sufficient enough to achieve the desired outcomes.

- Adequate facilities and equipment should be available.
- The question of wages / allowances / salaries should be discussed between the student and the participating organisation (CTM, 2000b:28).

4.2.2 Student selection

SASCE (2007:50) mentions that the final selection of students should be made by the participating organisation. The co-ordinator at the Higher Education Institution should attempt to find the appropriate student(s) for placement positions. Students' results, personal qualities, geographic and transportation preferences and restrictions, company requirements and student preferences should be considered, when the placement for each student is assessed.

Based on the above-mentioned criteria, the co-ordinator should guide the student in the selection of several companies, and arrange interviews with these companies for work-integrated learning. Several interviews should take place on campus with the students, the organisations and the co-ordinator before the final placement is made (SASCE, 2007:51).

4.2.3 Records

Records of the students' placements should be kept in order to facilitate communication and follow-up procedures. The students should be required to complete forms when applying for placement by providing all their demographic information. The details of the company should also be captured onto this form. This enables the co-ordinator to build up a database of company records, when planning visits to the companies (SASCE, 2007:51).

4.3 Mentoring of students

Students need to be mentored in the workplace by the employer to ensure that all aspects of the work-integrated learning programme are covered and that the students are productively engaged (Wessels, 2005:50).

4.4 Monitoring of work-integrated learning

According to Wessels (2005:51) it is essential that academic staff should monitor the progress of the students in terms of pre-defined learning objectives for the programme, in order to maintain an effective system of work-integrated learning. Where problems or deviations arise, the co-ordinator should then intervene with corrective action. The ideal situation is personal visits, but it may also be done by means of telephone calls and reports received.

4.5 Reflection on the experiences of students

When the students return to their campuses, reflection sessions should be arranged by the academic staff for them to reflect on their experiences of placement and the knowledge and skills competencies gained. An ideal situation may be created for first and second year students to attend these reflection sessions to assist in their preparation for the workplace in their final year of studies. The purpose of these reflection sessions is to optimise learning (Frontczak, 1998:25).

4.6 The assessment of students during work-integrated learning

Assessment criteria are statements that describe the standard to which students must perform the actions, roles, knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes in the learning outcomes. The students should therefore know what criteria are applied when they are assessed (SAQA, 2001:21).

Employers also have a role to play in the assessment of students. It is therefore necessary to make arrangements with employers to have appropriate staff assigned to students. Employers will need clear guidelines in terms of their involvement and responsibilities in the whole process. The study guide, logbook or work-integrated learning guidelines must include this information (Jacobs, 2005: 21).

According to Hay, Mahlomaholo, Van der Merwe, Brussouw, Friedrich-Nel, Lamprecht and Badenhorst (2004:103) the assessment of reports of work-integrated learning should only involve measuring the quality of the end product of the practical work and not the work itself. Work-integrated learning is practical work which may be referred to as “learning-by-doing”. The significance of work-integrated learning is increased when assessment is linked to it and it helps students to approach such work more earnestly and critically. Students should be made aware of the fact that work-integrated learning is about the processes and skills involved and to be successful in them.

Work-integrated learning is an integral part of the curriculum and the students need to be assessed summatively by providing evidence of the competencies and skills that they mastered during the work-integrated learning period. The ideal method of assessment may be a combination of performance-based and portfolio assessment which assesses the performance of the student (both process/means and outputs/ends), and what the student has actually learned from the placement (Wessels, 2005:48-51).

The possible value of portfolio assessment in co-operative education is that it allows the student freedom to express what he/she has learned. It will capture and document the student's unique learning experiences.

It selects and captures evidence of the learning from multiple sources, and allows the students to use their creativity and originality to present the evidence in a way that will lead the assessor through their learning journey (Frontczak, 1998:26).

Anselmi and Frankel (2004:169) stated that students engaged in the work-integrated learning programme, may be assessed on their performance by employing certain criteria, in order to determine if they have achieved certain workplace performance outcomes.

SASCE (2007:122) recommended that improvements should always be sought, while students, companies and the institution benefit from the implementation of a co-operative education programme. To maintain effective progress, quality improvement might be necessary to assure a quality partnership for tomorrow, when each partner has higher expectations.

5. QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Quality implies a systematic and continuing evaluation and a search for data, both subjective and objective, that will help identify the strong and weak points of the effort (SASCE, 2007:115).

Like all business programmes, graduate marketing education is facing increasing levels of scrutiny and demands for greater accountability. Changes in accreditation standards and procedures are demanding attention to measuring and improving the effectiveness of graduate education. According to Ellen and Pilling (2002:31), it is important for the lecturer/facilitator to understand what marketing skills and knowledge the students should possess upon degree completion and what employers require of students before they hire them.

SASCE (2007:115), recommended that the work-integrated learning programme should be reviewed and renewed on a continuous basis in order to implement quality control. This might be of considerable importance in the activities of arranging work-integrated learning placement for students. Students have only one opportunity to achieve a valuable placement experience which will comply with the course requirements. Therefore it is crucial, especially for students, that the institution, which arranges the placement for work-integrated learning, should take the necessary steps to assure a quality experience.

The partnership developed by the work-integrated learning programme should also reflect high quality experiences and continual improvement. All partners, (the student, the employer and the educational institution), should agree upon clear and realistic objectives. The work-integrated learning policies and objectives should therefore reflect commitment to quality (Engelbrecht, 2003:49).

In an amendment to the Higher Education Act, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) was deemed to be accredited by SAQA as the Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA) for the higher education band of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). A system of institutional audit has been implemented and the HEQC has used inclusive consultative processes to develop framework policies, criteria and manuals for institutional audits (CHE (Council on Higher Education), 2004:146).

Academic programmes were evaluated by HEQC-appointed peer review panels of subject specialists against certain criteria. All these criteria are regarded as relevant for ensuring and enhancing programme quality. Regarding work-integrated learning (work-based learning), criterion 15 of the HEQC states that the coordination of work-based learning should be done effectively, in all components of applicable programmes. This criterion also states that a work-integrated learning system should be implemented with an adequate infrastructure, and effective communication between all the parties involved in the work-integrated learning process should take place. Recording of the progress made by the students and the regular monitoring of the students' learning experience in the workplace should be done. A mentoring system should also enable the student to recognise the strengths and weaknesses in his/her work in order to develop existing and new abilities and to gain knowledge of work practices (HEQC (Higher Education Quality Committee), 2004:21).

5.1 Requirements for quality

When the requirements of placement, as a minimum, are achieved, it results in a quality partnership between the educational institution and the employer. Extra care and attention should be given to detail (SASCE, 2007:116).

5.1.1 Policy and objectives for quality

The policy in respect of courses should be to provide relevant tuition and experience, which prepare young professionals for a successful career. Academics should be committed to achieve and maintain this quality (HEQC, 2004:22).

5.1.2 Process control

It is essential that capable processes should be applied consistently to achieve the requirements of each step in the overall work-integrated learning placement process. The processes employed, may range from the first contact with the prospective employer and the new student to the award of the diploma and the required standards. Realistic and clear objectives at the start, with all the partners entering the arrangement with a clear understanding of expectations, will provide a good basis for success (Engelbrecht, 2003:52).

6. CONCLUSION

For work-integrated learning to be successful, cooperation between higher education institutions and the industry's learning needs should be established. Rossouw and Kruger, (2005:151) revealed that employers, students and educational institutions benefit from work-integrated learning practices as envisaged by the South African Society for Co-operative Education. The successful preparation of marketing students today entails developing marketing knowledge and workplace skills. To develop both skills and knowledge, students need to be exposed to work-integrated learning (work-integrated learning). The latter enhances students' readiness for the complex work environment and develops a deeper understanding of their course material.

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