

Client consulting projects on the block: Understanding sources of tension

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This presentation will explore client consulting projects embedded in both management and marketing courses in a 3.5-week block model, with a particular focus on the tensions inherent in teaching and learning with such projects. This work builds upon the study of work-integrated learning (WIL), such as client consulting projects conducted at Universities Australia in 2019 which bring together classroom theory and workplace practice.

Using a mixed-methods approach, we investigated the benefits, challenges, tensions, and key success factors in client consulting projects on the block. Overall, the major stakeholders – faculty, students, and clients – agreed that the benefits outweighed the challenges. Especially salient were the benefits to students of real-world experience, increased motivation and sense of meaningfulness, and the chance to deepen their learning by applying course concepts.

Most importantly, client consulting projects on the block present five tensions: the dual-evaluation nature of the project (both the professor and client are evaluating), the level of client engagement and alignment, scheduling and pacing, the level of professor guidance, and the degree of emphasis on traditional course content vs. the project. The understanding of tensions gained through this research will position faculty for greater success with client consulting projects on the block.