

## Strengthening industry and academic relationships through the Research Development Transfer (RDT) Scheme

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### **Background:**

Wintec's Research Development Transfer (RDT) Voucher Scheme receives practical research requests from local industry and communities to solve knowledge questions and develop business ideas for improving industry practice. After screening by the Research Office, the projects are allocated to academic staff, with relevant experience and expertise. It has been proposed that the RDT scheme be used as an industry project option for the new Bachelor of Applied Management (BAM) degree.

The writer has led two voucher projects. The first voucher project was completed with a work colleague from Wintec's School of Media Arts. The project's client was a Waikato community organisation which places intellectually disabled clients in work. They were seeking ideas to enhance their profile among existing and potential employer clients. The project also involved updating their publicity and promotional material.

The second project (recently completed) comprised a team of two academic staff and three business students. The client was a Trust seeking to raise \$6 million dollars for a multi-purpose community centre. Our brief was to review the project proposal and identify possible funding sources. The final report also included recommendations regarding a business plan and feasibility study. With the agreement of the trustees, a mentor was identified and arranged for the project.

### **Aims/objectives:**

The objective of this research paper is to ascertain the benefits of student involvement in RDT Vouchers and propose recommendations for their use as an industry project in the BAM degree.

### **Methods:**

Interviews are being conducted with the students, who have been involved in RDT voucher projects. A literature review is being undertaken, focusing on the benefits gained through experiential learning opportunities.

To date the following journal articles have been identified (some annotations added)

Kolb, D. Á., Boyatzis, R. E., & Mainemelis, C. (2001). Experiential learning theory: Previous research and new directions. *Perspectives on thinking, learning, and cognitive styles*, 1, 227-247. Kolb and his theory of experiential learning (also referred to as action learning) draws on the earlier work of Dewey, Lewin and Piaget. Kolb links education, work and personal development, through direct experience and learning by doing.

Nealy, C. (2011). Integrating soft skills through active learning in the management classroom. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning (TLC)*, 2(4).

Kayes, D. C. (2002). Experiential learning and its critics: Preserving the role of experience in management learning and education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 1(2), 137-149.

Robles, M. M. (2012). Executive perceptions of the top 10 soft skills needed in today's workplace. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 75(4), 453-465.

This study identified the top ten soft skills as perceived the most important by business executives: integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, social skills, positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility, teamwork, and work ethic.

Mitchell, G. W., Skinner, L. B., & White, B. J. (2010). Essential Soft Skills for Success in the Twenty-First Century Workforce as Perceived by Business Educators. *Delta Pi Epsilon Journal*, 52(1), 43-53.

"Soft skills describe career attributes that individuals should possess, such as team skills, communication skills, ethics, time-management skills, and an appreciation for diversity. In the twenty-first century workforce, soft skills are important in every business sector. However, employers in business continuously report that new employees are deficient in these soft skills."

Young, M. R. (2002). EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING = HANDS-ON + MINDS-ON. *Marketing Education Review*, 12(1), 43-51.

### **Results and conclusions:**

Through the use of RDT voucher projects, students are able to gain experience and skills in:

- Dealing with 'real life' business problems
- Project management/team/group work
- Analytical, problem solving and research
- Interviewing - client meetings
- Presentation – through final presentation to client
- Different forms of communication
- The development and strengthening of networking opportunities with local industry/community groups
- The strengthening of academic relationships with academic staff

The recommendations include:

- The desirability of early student involvement, including the selection of a project.
- The need to scope the project and establish an agreed timeline, early in the project.
- The use of a student contract to clarify student and staff roles.
- The desirability of student involvement in the initial meeting with the client and the final report/presentation of findings.
- The need to investigate issues around the size of the project, so it is comparable with other types of BAM industry projects.

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Jill Clark group work.

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# Strengthening Relationships

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