



## The Future of Education Can Be Messy

**Brett Fifield**

Lahti University of Applied Sciences (Finland)

[Brett.Fifield@gmail.com](mailto:Brett.Fifield@gmail.com)

### Abstract

In the current economic climate, innovative teaching and learning methodologies have a plethora of undercurrents as approaches to reducing cost by developing more efficient delivery systems [1], by utilizing online virtual solutions to increase access to free education such as edX [2], or by focusing on the national approaches of vocational teachers education [3] and /or Centers of Excellence [4]. Our approach to higher education builds on these themes, but pushes our delivery processes as a project network [5].

We approached Masters Level education as collaborative, strategically focused but pragmatically messy space, which creates commercially viable new business opportunities in the emerging markets, for the environmental sector. We wanted to go beyond the traditional secondary research of Masters Education [6]. We built a platform that recruited students from the emerging markets, brought them to Finland, allowed them to manage a large group of between 50 and 70 undergraduates, including exchange students, for an entire fall semester. This project creates a substantial package of coordinated secondary data / material that is analyzed with respect to business opportunities in three or four environmental markets, in three countries. This material is shared between and is available for the entire class at both undergraduate and graduate levels for their thesis projects.

As an interesting twist, the graduate students also had to compete with their undergraduate "employees" in order to show value added roles as master's students. Additionally, they were also required to bring the entire project in on budget. After the presentations of the strategic market opportunities, the students were required to evaluate each other's performance, both as a team and as individuals from both the graduate and the undergraduate students.

In the spring term, the group was then divided into clusters based on their selection their master thesis topic, and these clusters provided sparing members while developing their field research plans. The students presented their proposal and based on achievability, they were each provided 1000 euros of support for going to the target market to conduct an intensive field research and clarify their initial analysis of the market opportunities. Each student completed a PESTEL [7], Porters Five Forces [8], created a stakeholder analysis [9] and provided a specific strategic approach for developing a specific market opportunity.

Prior to graduation, the students have now contacted several of the potential companies and players with respect to the market opportunity. This approach to building a project network allowed a student to gain the market credibility when approaching potential employers. These were no longer students with limited industry experience. These were professional colleagues that understood the market issues and opportunities to contribute a strategic value added role for an organization.

In 18 months, we consistently graduated over ninety percent of the students on time, with real industry knowledge, and real business development capabilities. Our quality assessment program was able to track changes in the individual's self-perception of their individual capabilities and industry specific capacities over the four phases of the program, thereby documenting the industry capabilities targets set by the Finnish Ministry of Education [10].

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