Issues-Driven Learning: a Means of Enabling and Requiring Appropriate Learning

Janet Hesketh
South Africa
heskethj@gmail.com

Management and business science graduates, like those from other disciplines, are often said to lack attributes required by employers and professional bodies operating in rapidly changing contexts. Even when graduates' technical knowledge is sound they are regularly accused of lacking, for example, abilities to think independently, to engage in not only problem-solving but also problem-posing processes, to apply principles in new situations and to work collaboratively. The problem persists widely, despite university mission statements that demonstrate aspirations to produce graduates with such competencies.

If we are to address this mismatch between graduate competencies developed in universities and those required by employers it will involve new, systematically developed approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. The purpose of this paper is to establish how issues-driven learning (IDL) can be implemented in ways that require and enable students to develop the attributes and competencies sought by stakeholders, including the appropriate depth and elaboration of knowledge. Hence IDL involves students in understanding the implications of what they are learning and seeing how it relates to realistic situations and to other disciplines.

This conceptual paper draws on experiential learning theory (ELT) and research-based curriculum development projects involving South African students from a range of educational and socio-economic backgrounds to develop a model of IDL and to discuss how the approach enables and requires students to develop the widely sought graduate attributes. The paper also highlights challenges in implementing IDL and makes some recommendations on how these might be addressed.