

Cross-disciplinary Interactions in Work-integrated Learning

Sunitha Prabhu, Aidan Bigham
Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec), New Zealand
sunitha.prabhu@wintec.ac.nz; aidan.bigham@wintec.ac.nz

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Abstract

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is the intentional integration of theory and practice knowledge to prepare graduates towards securing a placement in the workplace or a work community arena (Orrell, 2011). The purpose of incorporating WIL into courses is to assist students with the complicated process of transferring skills gained in a formal educational setting to the workplace (Crebert et al., 2004). The term WIL is most commonly used to describe programmes where students engage with workplaces and communities as part of their studies (Smigiel & Harris, 2008).

Students graduate into a transdisciplinary world, not a monodisciplinary one (Scott, 2015). It is essential for education providers to ensure that their students are equipped with relevant discipline skills as well as generic, transferable skills (Orrell, 2004). Professionals in the field of information technology (IT), such as System analysts, Business analysts, Developers, IT services, and IT trainers must understand the workplace business requirements which may not necessarily be limited to IT. Hence it is crucial that our graduates develop skills that enable them to interact productively. In addition to shaping and supporting the learner for the workplace through practice-based experience, we look at ways to provide learners with the social skills necessary to interact and work with other disciplines as they transition from structured education to the workplace. In this study, we focus on cross-disciplinary approaches to develop the skills necessary for a graduate as they transition to the workplace. The objective is for the student to gain knowledge and understanding and to master the skills that emulate key aspects of the workplace (Beard & Wilson, 2006).

The paper aims to investigate how learners engage with the methods that are intended to provide them with practice-based learning. Cross-disciplinary teams worked together on industry problems and co-created the full cycle of problem-solving. Qualitative data was collected from 150 students across a range of disciplines, and 10 organisations through anonymous surveys and semi-structured interviews to gain students' perspective of cross-disciplinary WIL learning approaches. Preliminary results showed high satisfaction with the learning process, the interdisciplinary teamwork and the future-focused toolkit that can be applied to the IT industry and beyond. Students welcome the opportunity to work with industry as peers, while also enjoy creating events that involve industry. The feedback received from the IT students shows that they thrive with the

responsibility they are allowed to have and hence become aware of their personal development and growth as a working professional, which had improved retention and completion rates. Cross-disciplinary team members supply input to a project or question requiring specialist knowledge, allowing for the overall objective to be reached.

Based on the preliminary results, the authors conclude that working on cross-disciplinary projects helped students think beyond their expertise and understand the 'big picture' about working on projects in teams within an organisation. This also creates a way to give students responsibility which allows students to be motivated while also allowing autonomy to think about their own development during this situation. Interactions (directly with industry partners) gave students the guidance, confidence, motivation, and a sense of belonging.

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