Curriculum Design Pattern

Global Learning by Design

Name of Pattern

Designing a Virtual WIL Experience with Industry Partners in Transnational Locations

Date

December 2014

Abstract

This pattern can be used to set up and execute an authentic virtual WIL experience with Partner Organisations (POs) within a course.

The main objective is to provide students with an authentic, real-world, real-time experience while structuring the engagement in a way that industry partners are not subjected to unwanted impacts through ongoing student enquiries (especially important with large classes).

This pattern has three phases of engagement:

- Phase 1: Pre-semester - negotiating the relationship
- Phase 2: During the semester - managing the relationship
- Phase 3: Post-semester - deepening and extending the industry relationship

Rationale

To develop authentic, real-world learning experiences between industry and RMIT students that have meaningful outcomes for all participants. Outcomes should be material for both industry and university participants. Working on authentic business problems enhances RMIT graduate employability and also connects the University more deeply with industry.

Learning Context

This pattern is most applicable for those students who are coming to the end of their study where they are required to demonstrate their learning through methods such as direct application of theory into real-world contexts (final year of course). It is particularly suitable for courses that employ a problem based learning (PBL) approach.

This pattern is scalable as technology is used to manage the organisation/ student interface. The pattern can be used with small through to very large classes (1000+ students).

Learning Design

Student and academic/teaching staff experience

- Engaging in an authentic real-life experience where theories can be applied to real business problems
- Researching relevant data sets
- Asking critical questions
- Working in teams to address large and complex problems
- Assessing the implications and outcomes of their decision making

Academic/teaching staff will have the opportunity to:

- Extend their knowledge about the discipline through practical application
- Develop facilitation skills - each Partner Organisation problem set is unique, meaning teaching staff need to create unique ‘teaching moments’
- Develop research skills
- Test their understanding of the discipline with the other members of the teaching team in the context of direct application in a real-world contex
- Share teaching techniques that work in this particular context
- Bring individual knowledge and experience to the teaching context
- Face a new, unique and contemporary organisational ‘problem’ each and every semester
- Meet with PO representatives and extend their professional network.

Assessment design and practices

The assessment needs to be appropriate for both the WIL experience AND the Partner Organisation needs.

Group work enables a richer experience and provides scope for the student groups to write extensively and demonstrate mastery of the subject

Course assessment may typically include, for example:

- Group assignment 1 - Understanding the problem
- Group assignment 2 - Solving the problem
- Individual assignment - Reflective piece.

The assessment should also take into account:

- Group sizes (with allowances for some students to potentially drop out throughout the semester)
- Application of a number of theories due to the nature of the virtual WIL experience with the industry partner.

Extension activity - PO presentation

In addition to the assessment tasks, you the may also choose to include a non-assessable extension activity where student teams are randomly selected by the course co-ordinator to present their findings to the Partner Organisation.

Phase 1: Pre-semester

Negotiate the relationship (16 weeks before commencement of the semester)

Conduct a search for organisations that are large, have published data and extensive websites. Students require access to this kind of information as a base for the virtual WIL experience. Some ideas for selecting Partner Organisations include:

1. Choose organisations that already want to work with RMIT graduates. For example, there is a list of those organisations that attended the 2015 RMIT Careers Fair (The Big Meet) available at: http://www1.rmit.edu.au/careers/careersfair
2. Investigate your own network(s) - do you know someone who works in a large organisation that you might be able to work with? What about some of your colleagues or PhD students? Do they have contacts?
3. Which organisations are frequently appearing in the press lately?

4. Select organisations that are listed on the local stock exchange.
5. Consider approaching non-government organisations.
6. Approach organisations that would value the RMIT student cohort as future customers.
7. Choose organisations that make sense in the local context - for example, choose Vietnamese organisations if you are teaching in Vietnam. This also promotes good relationships between local organisations and RMIT.
8. Begin collecting data/resources about the PO in order to collate and provide information to teaching staff before the semester begins. Create a 'resource pack' and include things like media releases, annual reports etc. Students will most likely find this data in their investigations, and the teaching staff should know and have access to this information before they begin teaching so that they can discuss it with students. These resources are not given to the students.

NOTE: An extended lead-in timeline (e.g. 16 weeks) is critical - it is highly likely that there will be rejections and mis-starts with securing a Partner Organisation. Therefore, ample time needs to be available to arrange and secure a suitable industry partnership.

Negotiate the conditions (6 weeks before semester commencement)

1. Meet with the PO and co-create the conditions for a successful partnership. Negotiate timelines, availability, scope of assessment etc., so that the partnership addresses both the requirements of the course and the needs of the PO.
2. For the purposes of the extension activity (the PO presentation), secure agreement that a specific number of teams (with the number of teams to be agreed between you and the PO representative) can visit the organisation at the end of semester (once the project has concluded) to present their findings to PO representatives.

Create the online learning environment (4 weeks before semester commencement)

1. Set up the BlackBoard environment for students to access.
2. Check that any assigned readings for the semester are appropriate for the learning context and the PO.

3. Publish the teaching topic schedule so that students know what they will be learning and when, and when any visits by the industry partner will occur.
4. Design the assessment so that:
   a. Students are required to use their subject knowledge to solve a PO issue/problem; and
   b. The assessment can be shared with the PO upon completion (e.g. a project report).

Publish information, conduct teaching staff meeting and finalise assessment criteria (2 weeks before semester commences)

1. Publish information about the course - for example, post announcements on Blackboard and to any social media to which the class have access, publish a FAQ and provide necessary detailed information in the course guide.
2. Conduct a teaching staff team meeting:
   a. Prepare staff for the semester, and provide information regarding PO, e.g. distribute a PO 'resource pack' to staff.
   b. Finalise assessment criteria and marking rubrics.
   c. Schedule regular team meetings to be held throughout the semester to discuss how the semester is unfolding and to ensure teaching staff provide students with the same information, instructions etc. For example, as staff and students will be working with and researching a real-life organisation, in real-time, the teaching team's understanding about the organisation will develop and change. All teaching staff need to be on the same page.
3. Post assessment task criteria and marking rubrics to BlackBoard.

Contact the the Partner Organisation (1 week before semester commencement)

1. Contact the PO:
   a. Check that there have not been any changes that will impact the partnership arrangement.
   b. Ask the main contact person to shoot a short video welcoming the students. If the person does not want to shoot the video, the teaching staff member can shoot their own video that explains the nature of the engagement (see Resources/Technology section for an example video).

Phase 2: During semester - Managing the relationship

Teaching Week 1

1. In the first lecture, explain:
   a. how the semester will proceed;
   b. that the learning is a real-life, real-world problem that requires a solution; and
   c. that the assessment has been designed in a way that students will create an outcome that demonstrates their mastery of the subject.
2. Introduce the PO and the nature of the organisational problem/issue:
   a. If applicable, show the 'welcome' video that has been developed by you or the PO
   b. Explain the way in which technology will be used to liaise with the PO organisation. Reinforce that students are not to contact the PO directly under ANY circumstances. This ensures that the PO is not inundated with student inquiries.
3. Set a "consultant brief" live in the BlackBoard for students to see/access (see Resources/Technology section for an example brief).
4. If applicable, introduce the extension activity and explain that a number of teams will be randomly selected by the course coordinator/teaching team to present their findings directly to the PO.
5. If using social media to extend reach to students, set up accounts and provide links (see Resources/Technology section for an example).
6. Form students into teams for the virtual WIL experience activity - the size of the groups will depend on the number of students in the cohort. In locations where there are very large cohorts, manually allocate groups in BlackBoard.

Teaching Weeks 2 and 8

1. Set up the online interactive forum for students to ask the PO questions, for example, use Sli.Do (refer also to the Resources/Technology section for a Sli.Do demonstration).
2. Focus on delivering lectures that are contexualised for the PO's organisational issue or problem.

3. Encourage participation on the online forum by all students - this is critical to the success of the virtual WIL experience with the industry partner and to the relationship between the University and the PO. If there is little activity on the online forum, prompt students to remind them of the importance of this task

Teaching Weeks 3 and 9

The authentic nature of the interactions between the PO and students is important to strengthen the relationship and to underpin the authenticity of the real-life problem students are working to address:

1. Focus on delivering lectures that are contexualised for the PO's organisational issue or problem.
2. Share the link to the online forum with the PO representative to enable direct interaction with the students.
3. Ask the PO representative to:
    a. visit in Week 3 to provide a presentation about the organisation as part of the lecture and to answer questions, and
    b. participate in the lecture in Week 9 to answer further student questions.

Note: If a visit is not possible, use Skype to hold a digital video-conference within the lecture. Alternatively, ask if another member of the PO executive team can stand in.

Ongoing during semester

1. Review the course content in the light of what is learnt about the PO as the engagement progresses. It may be necessary to change topics, content or the order of lectures etc. to accommodate the specifics of the PO and their context.
2. Maintain regular contact with the PO on a fortnightly basis. Email and/or phone the PO representative. Provide an update on what students are doing, their findings, any interesting facts, etc. This helps deepen the relationship with the PO

Phase 3: Post-semester - Deepening and extending the industry relationship

Note: If Week 12 is the final teaching week, start at item 1.

Week 12

1. All assessment should be concluded by the last day of semester (before exam period).

Week 14

2. Mark and moderate assessment (conclude by end of Week 14).

Week 14 - Extension activity

3. Randomly select the relevant number of student teams to present their project findings to the PO (conclude selection process by end of Week 14).

Week 15 - Extension activity

4. Invite, by email, the relevant teams to present their findings to the PO after the exam period.
5. Arrange on the first Monday after exam period to conduct a preparatory 'presentation masterclass' for those teams that will be presenting to the PO. This workshop is designed to help the students understand what a 'boardroom ready' presentation looks like and to prepare them to present to the PO executives (see PO presentation activity information below for further details).

Week 16 - Extension activity

6. Arrange to have the selected teams present their findings to the PO in the week following the presentation masterclass (see details below).

Week 18 - Extension activity

7. Contact the PO to:
    a. evaluate the PO experience; and
    b. ask if the PO knows of any other organisation that may like to participate in this kind of effort and whether or not they are willing to act as a referral point.

Extension activity: PO presentation

Preparatory presentation masterclass

Deliver a one-day workshop to teach students to give boardroom ready presentations. Provide students with the opportunity to reflect on their report and to receive tips on how to present effectively. The objective of the presentation to the PO is not to repeat what is in the assignments, but rather to build on their findings and extend the idea - a 'pitch'.

1. Book a room that the students can work in and collaborate.
2. Ensure that all students bring their assignments to the workshop.
3. Have whiteboard markers, paper, post-it-notes etc. available to storyboard presentations.
4. If possible, arrange to have guest speakers who can offer advice and perspectives on what constitutes a good pitch, e.g. experts from industry (particularly board members), experts on marketing and messaging. The inclusion of guest speakers reinforces to the students that their work is valued and important.
5. At the start of the workshop, ask the students to give a three minute pitch about their work to the other groups:
    a. Encourage questions.
    b. Look for the 'story' in their ideas - what is the most valuable aspect of their work from the PO's perspective? This will form the basis of their presentation.
    c. Remind the students that their presentation is not to be a re-presentation of what they produced in their reports, but rather an extension and further explanation of some of the elements of their work and solution to the problem.
    d. Outline the expectations regarding the structure and duration of each team presentation (e.g. 15 minutes with an additional 5 minutes for questions).
6. Ask the students to identify what they think a good presentation should look like.
7. Show the first half of Nancy Duarte's Ted Talk on the science of giving a good presentation.
8. Get students to identify and work on what they think their 'story' will be

9. If possible, provide resources/books for the students to browse, for example:
    a. Presentation Zen (Garr Reynolds)
    b. Presentation Zen Design (Garr Reynolds)
    c. Slideology (Nancy Duarte)
    d. Resonate (Nancy Duarte) (also available as a free digital interactive ebook).
10. In the afternoon, show the second half of Nancy Duarte's Ted Talk on the science of giving a good presentation.
11. For the remainder of the day use the principles of good presentation design to get students to develop a first draft of the story/presentation structure.

PO presentations

1. Seek permission from the selected teams to PDF their final reports and send them to the PO so that the executives can read them before presentations are made.
2. Arrange to have the selected teams present their findings to the PO in the week following the presentation masterclass.
3. Select the order in which the student groups will present to the PO. This will be determined by the 'arc' of the story that needs to be told on the day. Often there will be a 'natural progression/ transition between presentations. In the absence of a 'natural order' it may be useful to put the strongest student groups first and last in the order - this creates a strong first impression for the PO and, as the final presentation is also strong, leaves a good impression. Let the students know the order before the day of the presentations - generally via email.
4. Arrange to borrow/use camera equipment to take photographs of the students and PO representatives to use for subsequent promotion and recruitment purposes.
5. Download photography consent release forms and get participants to sign the release forms.

Post PO presentations

Maintaining the relationship with the PO after the conclusion of the semester is important - it assists in deepening the University/ industry relationships and encourages opportunities for further engagement in other courses or research:

- Within two weeks after the presentations:

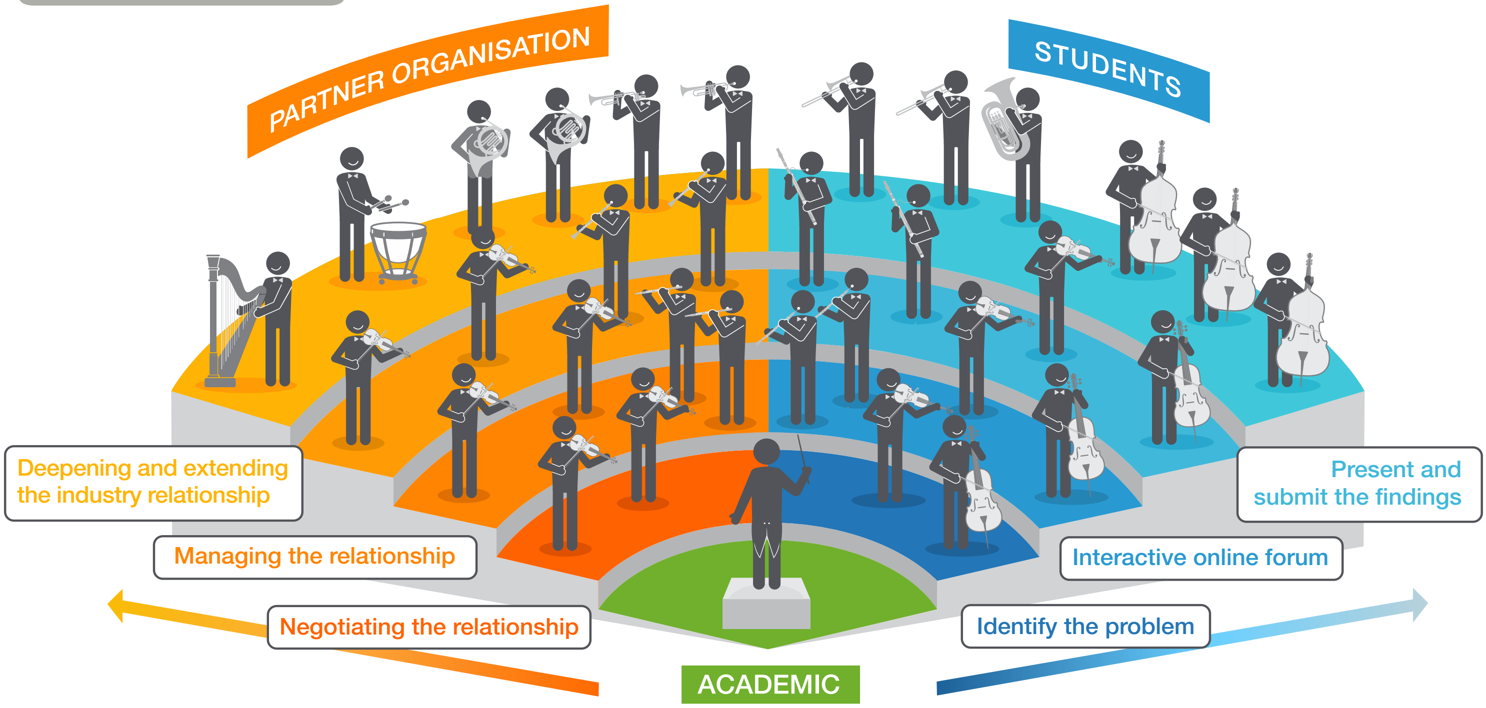
  - Evaluate the experience with the PO as to whether they found the experience beneficial/effective for their organisation and whether the exercise met, exceeded or did not meet their expectations. This feedback can be used to improve the process in the next engagement with other Partner Organisations.
  - Ask the PO if they know of any other organisation that may like to participate in this kind of effort and whether or not they are willing to act as a referral point. This can make recruitment of future POs significantly easier.
- Maintain regular contact with the PO - aim to make contact with the PO approximately every three months. Target your message to the context of the PO and provide added value, e.g. a copy of an article they might find interesting.

Critical Success Factors

"Passion and Heart" - Be genuinely committed to the discipline and the belief that the discipline can bring benefits to business and society.

Be aware of the needs of the organisation and be flexible with the course content

Managing student group dynamics



Designing a Virtual WIL experience with Industry partners in Transnational Locations

Challenges

- Recruiting suitable organisations can be difficult. To overcome this challenge:
  - Plan and prepare your pitch.
  - Explain how you can assist the PO to solve a problem or issue they might have.
  - Think in terms of a genuine partnership arrangement.
- Significant planning requirements involved - to address this challenge:
  - Begin planning and organising as early as possible.
  - Establish clear expectations early.
  - Leave enough time in the lead-up so that you can customise the assessment design in your course if you need to before course guides are published.
- Potential rejections and mis-starts in securing Partner Organisations:
  - An extended lead-in timeline is important (e.g. 16 weeks before semester commences) - ensure sufficient time is available to arrange and secure a partnership with a suitable organisation.
  - You might not find a suitable PO before the semester starts. In this case, it is likely you've researched enough organisations that fit the selection criteria that you can adopt a traditional case study approach in place of a PO approach.
- Unpredictable working arrangements with Partner Organisations:
  - Prepare to be flexible - sometimes events occur in the context of the PO that needs a quick response, e.g. your key contact retires/changes job/the business restructures etc.

Conditions

- Course leader commitment and organisation - the course leader needs to:
  - Be genuinely committed to the discipline and the belief that the discipline can bring benefits to business and society. Without this, POs are less likely to participate as the relationship may be perceived as not being genuine.

The course leader needs to be committed to providing a genuine outcome for the PO through the discipline.

  - Be organised - a well thought out plan at the start helps ensure the project does not get off track.
  - Be committed to bringing benefits of the partnership to all parties.

- The course leader and teaching staff need to be aware of the needs of the organisation and to be able to tailor lecture and tutorial content during the semester in a way that helps the students to address the PO issue or problem. Flexibility is important.
- A clear project scope is needed to guide both the students and teachers and to also help manage the expectations of the PO (see Resources/Technology section for example consultant brief).
- Rules regarding PO contact are required. Students need to know from the outset that they are not to contact the PO directly. A specific type/channel of technology is used to communicate with the PO. This significantly reduces the resourcing requirements of the organisation.
- Effective management of group dynamics - managing group dynamics can be difficult, use an equity of contribution process to help manage group performance issues (see Resources/Technology section for example equity of contribution guidelines).

Resources/Technology

Education Resources

- Welcome video example
- Consultant brief - example
- Example of social media integration (FaceBook)
- Sli.Do demonstration
- 2014 Equity of contribution guidelines

Technology resources

- BlackBoard
- iMovie (or similar)
- Email
- Project planning software (e.g. OmniPlan)

- Task management software (e.g. OmniFocus2)
- Writing software (e.g. Microsoft Word)
- Presentation software (e.g. Powerpoint)
- PDF writing software (e.g. Adobe Acrobat)
- Social media (e.g. FaceBook Page, Twitter, Buffer)
- Camera equipment (from AV Loans)

Other resources

- Tripod for shooting video, e.g. Manfroto Tripod
- A clip for iPhone or similar to shoot video, e.g. iPhone tripod mount
- Microphone for video (e.g. rhode smartlav lapel mic) and extension lead
- Host video in Blackboard (LMS)

Case Studies

Designing a Virtual WIL Experience with Industry Partners in Transnational Locations - School of Management

Outcomes

Students are required to demonstrate their ability to master the subject matter through the direct application of the subject material to a real-life, real-world business problem defined by an actual business (Partner Organisation).

Teams are required to come up with a solution to an organisational problem. They are required to use subject matter knowledge and creativity to solve the problem, rather than a direct explanation of how theory is applied in a typical situation. Students have to figure out how to define the problem and use theory and research skills to work towards a solution that a real organisation will find acceptable. Working in teams, students are required to develop team and self-management skills and work towards a deadline.

Students report that this approach is authentic, challenging and that it is satisfying to come up with a real solution to a real problem rather than just conducting a case analysis. If engagement is managed carefully, the students are able to see how their work can potentially have a real impact in industry.