

Innovating PBL model: Evidence from BSc Semester Project

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Presentation outline

- **Introduce student-company fair**
 - **Context**
 - **Innovating PBL process**
 - **Learning reflections**
- **Q&A**

Context



- **Semester project**
 - **30 ECTS**
 - **Identify and solve a (business) problem**
 - **Groups**

Traditional approach

- **How usually this is done**
 - **Finding companies for BSc semester project**



Innovating PBL process

- **Semester project**
 - **30 ECTS**
 - **Identify and solve a (business) problem**
 - **Groups**

- **Partnership:**
 - **Supporting Entrepreneurship at Aalborg (SEA) – companies**
 - **International Business Centre (IBC) - students**

Innovating PBL process (cont'd)

- **Process:**
 - **Identifying companies (SEA)**
 - **Forming the groups (IBC)**
 - **Conducting student-company fair (SEA+IBC)**
 - **Matching (SEA+IBC)**
 - **Supervision and first meeting (IBC)**
 - **Problem solving/project writing (students)**
 - **Project evaluation and examination**
 - **Semester project competition day**

Innovating PBL process (cont'd)

- **Identifying companies (SEA)**
 - **Sends us per company:**
 - **Short bio**
 - **Tentative problems, issues**
 - **Person attending the student-company fair**
 - **Contact person during the project**
 - **Sets expectations:**
 - **No non-disclosure agreements**
 - **Commitment**
 - **Access to company data depending on the problem**
 - **Learning vs. employing**

Innovating PBL process (cont'd)

- **Forming the groups (IBC)**
 - **Students form own groups based on the following criteria**
 - **5 in a group**
 - **Multi-nationality (all 5 shall be of different nationality)**
 - **Students post the groups via moodle**
 - **Training on pitching**
 - **Prepare their CVs**



Innovating PBL process

(cont'd)

➤ **Conducting student-company fair (SEA+IBC)**

- **Students and companies get together learn about each other**
- **Max 3 hours**



- **Entrepreneurs present their companies and identify potential problems/issues (3-5 min/company)**



- **Each team has 7 minutes to pitch their case to each company**



- **Teams and companies fill in scorecards**

➤ **Matching (SEA+IBC)**



- **SEA and IBC independently match the scores**

Innovating PBL process

(cont'd)

- **Supervision and first meeting (IBC)**
 - **Before meeting with the company:**
 - **Familiarize as much as possible about the company, its products/services, its markets**
 - **Try to understand what the real issue is from the problem statement – through brain-storming and Q&A try to distil a number of specific, focused problems/issues**
 - **Meet with your supervisor and discuss your findings**
 - **Discuss with your supervisor how you would conduct the first meeting with the company (strategies and tactics)**
 - **Agree with supervisor on possible dates for a joint meeting (together with your supervisor) with the company**
 - **Contact the company and ask for a meeting**

Innovating PBL process (cont'd)

- **Supervision and first meeting (IBC)**
 - **At the meeting with the company:**
 - **Problem formulation:**
 - **At least 3 problems**
 - **Discuss and prioritize with the company the problems**
 - **Agree on one, clearly defined, narrow in scope**
 - **Access to company, data, decision-makers:**
 - **Problem-led access**
 - **Entrepreneur/CEO's commitment**
 - **Students shall be mindful of entrepreneur/CEO' time**

Innovating PBL process (cont'd)

- **Problem solving/project writing (students)**
- **Project evaluation and examination**
 - **Business report**
 - **Students will submit business report to entrepreneur/CEO for review and comments 2 weeks before semester project deadline**
 - **Entrepreneur/CEOs will receive evaluation form and will submit their evaluations to the groups and supervisors**
 - **Examination report**
 - **Incorporate suggestions from entrepreneur/CEOs and submit your examination report**

Innovating PBL process

(cont'd)

➤ Semester project competition day (SEA + IBC + Study Board)



➤ **Held after students submit their semester projects**

➤ **Students have the opportunity to**

➤ **Present their findings**

➤ **Answer questions from the panel**

➤ **Prepare for the exam**

➤ **Interact with and learn from each other**

➤ **Win a prize (SEA + Study Board+ Companies)**

➤ **1st prize: paint ball**

➤ **2nd prize: dinner in the city**

➤ **3rd prize: cinema tickets**

Learning reflections

➤ **Students speak:**

- **Discussing with real world businessmen, and understanding actual real life problems companies have and we could solve**
- **We had the chance to choose the most attractive company for our semester project**
- **The fair made us more motivated to put more efforts into studying, as well as learn more about the entrepreneurs and companies can be creative**
- **The thing that 'we have to sell ourselves' to the company was very attractive - it gave us experience which we will need when looking for a job in a future and going to work interviews**
- **We should forget our personal fight during the meeting and talk as a group without problems; the company doesn't have to feel that people in the group don't like each other**

Learning reflections

- **Students speak (cont'd):**
 - **I was surprised by willingness of the companies to collaborate with students and the fact that they value our opinions and ideas**
 - **Getting 10 interview experiences within less than two hours is a great opportunity**
 - **We've got an opportunity to try acting in a challenging and competitive working environment and realized that we have to stand out from the crowd**
 - **It is interesting to understand that every 'field' could become your business idea**

Learning reflections

➤ Companies speak:

- **What was most attractive at the fair was diverse nationalities within the groups, students were quite engaged, and well prepared; good group CVs**
- **Very motivating students, with strong background in the field of business, and strong communications skills with clear focus on the semester project**
- **We had a real good discussion with the groups about the project and our product, and during these discussions we have already learned something we can take from the fair, even without starting the project – this was great experience**
- **Each team had a comprehensive introduction of the team, and each member individually; personally I found very hard to evaluate each team because I felt each team was able to provide, at least to our company, a lot of inputs**

Learning reflections

➤ Companies speak (cont'd):

- **It has been a pleasure. On the way to the fair I was thinking to have a nice, relaxing four hours before I go to work. But it did not happen. What happened? Well, I had to think a bit more than I expected. I actually had to come up with some fresh ideas**
- **It is an experience we could get value from...new knowledge and exciting questions**
- **Do it again next year, great event**
- **The students were well prepared and knew a lot about our company... and had very creative introductions**
- **In discussions, going through the history, idea and aspirations of our company generated new ideas, and new possibilities for development**

Learning reflections

- ***AAU Vice-Rector Inger Askehave (Feb 14, 2014).***
 - **“This event is truly breathing life into Aalborg problem based learning model... it is problem based learning in practice... It is one of the ways to innovate our problem based learning model”**

Effects from PBL innovation

- Student level
- Business environment level
- University level
- Department level
- Staff level





Q&A

