



Keynote presentation: **Project Management, Technology and Evolving Work Processes: working with authentic clients in the classroom to prepare students for a rapidly changing work environment**

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ABSTRACT

Bridging the classroom and workplace is a challenge in the Project Management classroom because students rarely have the opportunity or the experience needed to head up large projects. So how can instructors present the opportunity to develop skills and gain experience needed to understand project management in a classroom setting? To begin to answer this question, the presentation describes three key strategies used in a Project Management course developed from a communications perspective in the International Bachelor Program in Marketing and Management Communication, Business & Social Sciences, Aarhus University.

First, this Project Management course involves continual, ongoing development through working with real clients. To learn about project management from a communications perspective, learners were asked to work in teams for project conception and planning. To communicate with the client, they needed to learn about and use project management documentation, as well as how to design and plan a useful project in a context with real multiple stakeholders. This instructional strategy focused the course not on Project Management software per se, which is changing so rapidly that today's tools may not be used in the workplace when students graduate, but rather on the "engine" of problem solving and communication strategies which drives projects and affects project success from the stakeholders point of view. Once students understand the engine, they are able to not only use software tools, but understand the significance of their planning process and interpret visuals produced by the tools more effectively.

Second, learners were given the opportunity to analyze an authentic complex audience, and frame the problem to which their project would respond. Thus, they learned not only what the project management documents looked like, but also how these documents are interconnected and work together to solve a problem. In addition, as they were in communication with a real client, they needed to work iteratively, changing their understanding of the problem, which in turn changed their options for solving the problem as well as planning and communicating the solution. This dynamic participation in problem solving helped students gain experience beyond recognition and reproduction

of the surface structure of the documents because they could see what their writing accomplished as the client responded to their projects.

Finally, learners were expected to bridge theory and practice by the manner in which they framed their projects. They were introduced to literature in four categories: Project Management Overview, Project Management Processes, Knowledge Management Theory and Case studies. Then, they were challenged to integrate key concepts from Knowledge Management theory into their project, as well as use the other readings to guide them in their work processes. In applying Knowledge concepts to their project management documentation assignments, students were challenged to rethink their understanding of knowledge, which then led to changing their understanding of both the problem and solution. This required them to connect knowledge management theory to their understanding of the problem, their framing of the solution, as well as recommendations for communicating knowledge gained in the project the future.

In summary, the combination of using real clients, analyzing an authentic complex audience and setting up the curriculum to support connections between theory and practice in assignments enables learners to gain relevant experience with and build their skills for applying project management tools in authentic contexts. This combination prepares students for a rapidly changing work environment by helping them focus on problem solving skills relevant to Project Management regardless of the technology used to support it.