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EVENT EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH INDUSTRY - IS IT WORTH IT?

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines a case study of industry engagement in the context of the emerging field of event management education at Victoria University, Melbourne.

There are a number of well documented benefits associated with bringing industry into the classroom, such as giving students the opportunity to network with industry professionals, and enabling increased contextualisation of learning, but at the same time there are challenges to be faced, particularly by the teaching staff organising such events. Such challenges include the time it takes to organize these events, and the financial costs involved for the School or Department. The paper uses evaluative data and reflections from the teaching staff to identify the major benefits of bringing industry into the classroom and concludes that although there are indeed challenges, the benefits

for students, academic staff, industry and the university as a whole do outweigh any difficulties.

Keywords: event management, education, industry engagement

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines a case study of industry engagement in the context of the emerging field of event management education at Victoria University, Melbourne. There are a number of well documented benefits associated with bringing industry into the classroom, and these all point to the fact that industry engagement is an important and useful tool in student learning. Such benefits for students include the opportunity to network and build relationships with industry professionals, whilst benefits for the industry participants include the opportunity to get to know the next generation of employees, and potentially affect change further by becoming involved in the design of course curricula. Concurrently, there are a number of challenges associated with industry involvement in universities. This paper aims to provide a balanced discussion of both perspectives.

Evaluation data collected from a series of industry engagement events is used to highlight the real benefits that students derive from attendance of such events, and also how useful such industry engagement can be from the industry practitioners' point of view. In addition, the reflections of the teaching team are also incorporated in this paper, in order to assess how the problems of organising industry events for students (such as the time it takes, the financial costs involved and the reliability or otherwise of both students and speakers) can translate into genuine benefits for all concerned.

These insights, whilst not definitive, do highlight the implications for practice in ensuring that successful industry engagement opportunities ultimately overcome the challenges involved to benefit students, industry practitioners, academic staff and the university community as a whole.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Engagement with industry can be categorised under the umbrella term of Learning in the Workplace (LiW) even though it does not fit the dominant models usually discussed under this broad term. However, it can be argued LiW takes on many guises and if we examine some of the pedagogical foundations of LiW it becomes clear that engagement with industry fits well within this pedagogical framework. Cullen, Hadjivassilian, Hamilton, Kelleher, Sommerlad and Stern (2002) see work-based learning in terms of “overlapping and competing paradigms, each based on theoretical premises and understandings and manifested in different practices” (p. 30). So whilst traditional or dominant LIW paradigms place the student in the workplace for at least some of the time, industry engagement may see the student spend time in the workplace but can also include the workplace coming to the student. Industry engagement includes many of the same pedagogical principles of LiW.

Pedagogy can be seen as the overriding philosophy of why and how we teach, taking into account the various aspects of the learning process, the learning context, and the relationship between teacher and student (Waters, 2005). The pedagogy of industry engagement, whilst not “the situated in the workplace” pedagogy, does include some of the characteristics of the workplace. These include:

- ❖ Front-loaded instructions
- ❖ Mutual self-instruction
- ❖ Observation and

❖ Mentoring (Hughes & Moore, 1999).

Guile and Griffith (2001, p. 119) see LiW as a context for 'communities of practice' where it is possible for the learner to establish relationships between work and study. Engagement with industry, as discussed in this paper, is closely related to Guile and Griffiths' (2001, p. 120) 'connective model' in their LiW typology. This model "underpinned by the reflexive theory of learning" (Keating, 2006, p.14) enables students through their classroom curriculum in collaboration with industry to participate in learning associated with the workplace and with the industry relevant to their course.

Industry engagement can also be viewed in the context of university and industry partnerships. These partnerships also take on numerous guises - some of the more common ones being "research collaborations, student scholarships, student recruitment, visiting professorships, classroom support and advisory board functions" (Prigge, 2005, p. 222). Benefits and risks associated with university-industry partnerships are many and have been discussed by a number of authors (Bok, 2003; Matthews & Norgaard, 1984; Reams, 1986; Zinser, 1985). Proactive management of university-industry relationships can minimise risks and enhance the benefits of the relationships (Burquel, 1997; Dryden & Erzurumlu, 1996; Groonroos, 1994; Gummesson, 2002; Jain, Jain & Khar, 2003; Tornatzky, Waugaman & Gray, 2002; Zinser, 1985).

If we consider industry engagement as an ongoing relationship between the students, industry and educational institutions many of the benefits associated with LiW also apply to industry engagement. In LiW, and particularly in the internship and co-operative work models, students gain important work-related skills in addition to their academic knowledge and thus enhance their employability in a very competitive jobs market. A valuable link between the employer and the educational institution is also forged (Williamson, 2005) and this relationship offers advantages for all parties – students, industry and the educational institution (Leslie & Richardson, 2000; Matthews

& Norgaard, 1984; Moscardo & Norris, 2004). Similarly, these benefits apply equally to the industry engagement model.

In particular, as a result of engaging with industry, students have the opportunity to interact with industry experts, ask questions, get insight into an industry and structure and present their work with industry in mind, thus gaining valuable skills pertaining to that industry. These skills enhance the curriculum and the overall course of study as well as enhancing student skills and attributes. In Guile and Griffiths' connective model these skills are reflected in the concepts of:

- ❖ "Reflexivity
- ❖ Working collaboratively to apply and develop knowledge
- ❖ Poly contextual and connective skills and
- ❖ Developing partnerships with workplaces to create 'environments for learning'" (2001, p.120).

The main benefits for the industry are access to potential students, transfer of knowledge from the academic to the industry sector and visa versa and an understanding of the academic component of the course (Busby, 2005; Leslie & Richardson, 2000; Tribe, 2002). For the university, the benefits include establishing valuable industry relationships, showcasing students and thus enhancing the university's reputation, opening dialogues between academe and industry and forging potential collaborative research partnerships. In light of the benefits to students, industry and the university, course programmes can be improved through an ongoing relationship between all involved partners.

As well as the many benefits gained from LiW activities, these are also associated with risks, costs and challenges (Boud, 2003; BHEF, 2001; Florida, 1999; Keating, 2006; Matthews & Norgaard, 1984; Stankiewicz, 1986; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Zinser, 1985).

The more common ones associated with industry-university partnerships are the resources needed for programmes, liaising with employers, attitudes of teaching staff and conflicts of interest (Keating, 2006; Prigge, 2005). Thus, it becomes obvious that any effective university industry partnership depends on clear benefits for all parties, risk minimisation, the commitment of all parties and relationship management.

Recently many universities have been reviewing their LiW policies and structures as well as their partnerships with industry in order to enable graduates to be more 'job-ready', possess skills required by the industry and thus gain a competitive edge in the job market. So for example, the University of Queensland's School of Tourism has embarked on a number of initiatives in the area of industry engagement, partly driven by a critical assessment of the existing, traditional LiW place models and partly by its repositioning strategy (Solnet, Robinson & Cooper 2007). In view of industry as a major stakeholder, these initiatives have been underpinned by the stakeholder theory (Freeman 1984; Christou 2002; Cooper & Westlake 1998; Solnet 2003; Lewis 2005). In addition to the benefits already listed are the networks and impressions of the industry that students are able to form (Solnet et.al 2007).

Similarly, Victoria University, where this case study is based, has formulated a new positioning strategy 'Making VU' and LiWC (Learning in the Workplace and Community) is fundamental plank of that strategy. By 2011 all courses will need to incorporate at least 25% of LiWC assessment (McLennan & Leihy, 2008). Numerous models ranging from short-term projects to industry placements have been incorporated into the VU strategy (Keating, 2006). The industry engagement initiatives outlined in this paper do not fit neatly into the existing models, however, they do share many of the elements of good practice that are fundamental to the strategy. These elements include benefits for all parties involved, integration within the curriculum, active engagement by students, critical reflection on the learning activity and clearly defined learning outcomes (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993; Keating, 2006). These

initiatives and the associated benefits, costs and challenges in offering them, are now discussed in detail in the context of the emerging area of event management education.

INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES IN EVENT MANAGEMENT EDUCATION: THE VU EXAMPLE

The VU undergraduate event management program has been offered as a degree specialisation since 2003. It is currently the only event management degree offered in Victoria and one of only a few programs in Australia. Since its inception, it has grown in popularity and as with any emerging discipline area; it has undergone continual refinement (with course reviews in 2004 and 2008) to ensure the specialisation meets the needs of students and their future employers, the event industry sector.

This paper details two major initiatives introduced to integrate industry perspectives into the VU event management specialisation. The first of these was adopted to overcome what the event management teaching team perceived to be a common problem in separately organising guest lecturers from industry to come to speak to students in the context of individual units. It was felt that whilst students expressed a desire to hear first hand from industry speakers, this often proved less than successful due to poor attendance by students (particularly apparent if the total unit enrolment was relatively small) and indeed if students did attend, often a reluctance on their part to effectively engage and ask questions of the industry speaker. Therefore, such learning exercises sometimes proved an ineffective use of the considerable time, effort, skills and experience of the invited speakers. To counter this situation, a whole of discipline approach was adopted, which from semester two 2007 saw the hosting of one key industry seminar per semester targeted to all students studying units of the event management specialisation. Furthermore, with the support of the School of Hospitality, Tourism and Marketing (HTM), a networking lunch was held in conjunction with each seminar. It was anticipated that this would enable students to meet and mingle with the

invited speakers in a more informal setting, ultimately boosting their self confidence and providing them with skills to go out and 'network' and engage with industry professionals. Students were selected to attend the lunch based on their independent study of the topic at hand and subsequent submission of a question to ask of the invited speakers. This also aimed to ensure an improved level of student interaction with the speakers, which generally led to further questions and discussion from the wider group of attendees during the more formal proceedings of the seminar.

The invited guests of the inaugural industry seminar were the Global Board of Directors of the International Association of Convention Centres (IACC; <http://www.iaconline.org/index.cfm>). This high profile, international group presented on the role of conferences centres in the events sector. In semester one 2008 (April), theme based seminars were introduced, which saw speakers and students discuss 'Future Challenges for the Events Industry'. The theme of the most recent seminar (August 2008) was 'Working in Tourism and Events: Insights from Industry Leaders on Opportunities, Career Paths and Lessons Learned'. To date these widely publicised events have been well attended by students. Apart from IACC, these industry events have attracted as speakers representatives from a convention centre, a sporting venue/club, a professional conference organiser, a multi-event venue and a special event management company. In addition, VU graduates now working in the events industry have been invited to speak at these industry events.

The second initiative is aimed at involving industry in providing feedback on student assessment. In the context of the event management specialisation unit BHO3494 Meetings, Conventions and Events, students in groups prepare a business plan for a hypothetical festival or major event with an expected attendance of at least 10,000 visitors. Students are directed to avoid duplicating existing events, hence they are encouraged to take ownership and be creative in developing their event concepts. Students often cite this assessment as the most beneficial of their event management

degree as it provides them with tangible evidence, often as part of their portfolio when seeking employment, of the scope of their learning in a manner that is meaningful to future employers. To further associate the business plan with 'real-world' outcomes, in semester two 2007, the event management teaching team introduced the innovation whereby students receive feedback on their business plan from industry experts in the form of a panel session. Accompanying the written business plan, each group undertakes a 20 minute oral presentation in class providing an overview of their planned event. Four groups were selected on merit, based on the quality of their business plans and accompanying presentations, to take part in the inaugural industry panel session. These sessions are now a permanent fixture of the unit BHO3494 and are also accompanied by a networking function to encourage students to mix informally with the industry participants. To date, representatives from a major event venue, a visitor attraction and an event management company have provided formative feedback to students on their business plans.

The ensuing discussion of the challenges and benefits of organising these initiatives will explore whether they are meeting the desired goals of enhancing students' interpersonal skills, broadening their horizons regarding their future in the event industry and inspiring students to learn from the example of current industry professionals. To support this discussion, wherever possible, evaluative feedback collected from both speakers and student participants will be qualitatively reported in an anonymous fashion. This feedback, along with the reflections of the event management teaching team of Junek, Lockstone and Mair, provides the basis for this study. We acknowledge this data is not definitive, however, it does provide some interesting insights into the practicalities of involving industry in event management education.

CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH ORGANISING INDUSTRY EVENTS

As discussed in the literature review there are a number of difficulties and challenges associated with establishing industry-university partnerships, in this particular case organising industry-related initiatives for students. These challenges, largely faced by the teaching staff organising these events, can be broadly categorised as resources, opportunity costs, time involved and hit rate, speaker management, reliability issues and the need for incentives.

One of the most obvious hurdles to inviting industry into the classroom is the financial costs or resources involved. Although not large in themselves, nonetheless each industry guest/speaker requires cab-charges or parking permits, and there is usually catering organised for events such as this – the costs of catering can easily spiral with larger groups. For example, the networking lunches organised in conjunction with the semester-based industry seminars usually attract between 20-30 guests comprising industry guest speakers, students and staff. Whilst the inclusion of students at these functions is designed to make these events more valuable for them, providing an excellent opportunity to meet industry professionals and make contacts that may prove useful for them in future, such lunches come at a financial cost, which in light of tightening university budgets often need to be strongly justified.

It is also necessary to consider the less quantifiable opportunity cost of staff time spent on organisational or administrative matters associated with these events. For academic staff, under pressure to fit in teaching and research as well as a wealth of other coordination and administration duties, time spent organising industry events for students could, arguably, be better spent on more outcome directed activities such as working on research projects, writing papers, completing research grant applications or simply preparing for teaching. Therefore an assessment has to be made as to whether

the benefits of such industry events outweigh the opportunity costs for staff in organising them.

Discussion of opportunity costs leads on to an evaluation of the time spent in planning the industry seminars and panel sessions. Although these events in themselves are likely to be of short duration (perhaps two – three hours), this gives little indication of the amount of time that is actually spent in the planning stages. Initially, industry professionals have to be approached and since they are busy people with busy diaries, such approaches have to be made well in advance. In fact the lead time for an industry presentation can be as long as 6 months. It is worth mentioning at this juncture that it is necessary to contact a number of industry professionals before a panel of speakers can be gathered. The hit rate is not always good and sometimes it is necessary to contact several industry professionals in order to find one who is willing and available on the specified date. Again, this all adds to the time that it takes to organise such events.

Once speakers have been found who are available on the date and are willing to attend the campus, a process of administrative arrangements ensues. This includes organising a room or venue for the seminar, arranging for catering, ensuring the speaker AV requirements are met and keeping the speakers informed and engaged. It can immediately be seen that this all takes time, and even once these tasks have been completed, there is still a requirement for follow up and further organisation, this time of the audience.

In order for such events to be successful, it is essential to have an audience of interested and engaged students (and academics). Therefore the seminars and panel presentations have to be promoted to all potential attendees and experience has shown that students in particular require constant reminders about the seminars and presentations. Time is taken up with the preparation of slides to include in lectures, email reminders and posters, all advertising the industry seminars or presentations.

Despite the best efforts of the teaching team, there can sometimes be problems with reliability. Industry speakers, who have committed to the event some months in advance, still occasionally pull out at the last minute despite interim communication. This can be entirely understandable as such people may have more pressing deadlines, which although might not have been readily apparent when they initially agreed to participate nevertheless take precedence over speaking at a student seminar. As organisers, it is worthwhile bearing this in mind and having backup speakers to call upon should the need arise. Students too are notoriously unreliable audiences – although they are reminded with emails, posters and in lectures, many simply forget to attend, choose not to at the last minute or if they do, may not be punctual in attending. Whilst the initiatives outlined in the paper were designed to alleviate some of these issues and enhance student engagement, and to a certain extent they have been successful in these aims, reliability remains one of the major concerns when organising these events.

Even when all speakers turn up, there is no guarantee (unless they have been speakers at a previous event) that they will be accustomed to speaking to students, or that they will be able to engage with the students. Many industry professionals, whilst being excellent contacts and role models for students, are not necessarily good at public speaking or at engaging with their student audience. Speaker management is important in this context in order to invite people who are likely to be able to engage with the students, and to adequately brief the speakers beforehand about the topic of the seminar, the approximate make up of the audience and perhaps the type of questions that they are likely to be asked.

At the same time, even when good numbers of students turn up, there is no guarantee that they will engage with the speakers, listen with interest and be willing to put questions to the speakers afterwards. An embarrassing silence can often ensue when a

speaker has finished and students have no questions to put to them. In order to avoid this scenario, having students submit questions in advance to put to the speakers, as a basis for being selected to participate in the networking lunches accompanying the seminars, ensures that there are is an adequate starting point for questions, which in turn encourages other students to speak out and pose their own queries.

In conclusion to this section, it can be seen that in themselves there are a number of challenges associated with organising the industry seminar and panel sessions. As such, it is reasonable to consider whether the benefits of these industry initiatives outweigh the costs and challenges associated with them.

BENEFITS OF INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT IN THE CLASSROOM

The benefits of involving industry in the classroom can be divided into four distinct categories which, when put together, provide a critical mass of benefits for all stakeholders. Initially there are of course benefits to the students associated with industry participation in their courses. In addition, there are benefits to the industry representative that accrue from engaging with academic staff and students. Finally, there are benefits for the staff directly involved and broader university that result from close cooperation with a number of industry partners.

STUDENTS

An important part of teaching at VU is contextualizing learning. One way to do this is to invite industry speakers into an academic forum, allowing students to put their learning into practice. In the event management program at VU this takes the form of either attending a presentation from industry speakers, with the opportunity to ask questions of the speakers, or students being selected on merit to present their business plans to a panel of industry experts. In the context of the industry speakers and

industry panel, wherever possible, former VU graduates now working in industry are invited to take part, to give the students some sense of the types of jobs they may be able to attain when they leave university. This is particularly popular with students, who feel more able to associate themselves with recent VU graduates: *“I found it great to have VU graduates as speakers, it makes it more ‘realistic’ from our perspective, and shows us that everyone has to start somewhere”* (student, semester 1 2008 industry seminar). Another comment provided further evidence of this: *“It was great to have a recent graduate from VU – I think that it is sometimes easier for students to relate well with a young person new into the industry and it can give people a positive feeling to hear that they are doing well and have found a position that they enjoy”* (student, semester 1 2008 networking lunch).

The industry speakers are also able to provide a form of ‘reality check’ for our students – *“I learned that the events industry is not as glamorous as it seems, and that it is very competitive. Also, that there are a lot of expectations when involved in events, but that if you are passionate and driven and flexible it is very worthwhile”* (student, semester 1 2008 industry seminar).

For students, the opportunity to attend industry seminars and participate in presentations to industry injects a real-life dimension to their studies. Subjects and topics that are routinely taught in class can come alive in the hands of talented speakers from industry. Students benefit from getting actual examples of industry practice and from seeing the theoretical constructs that they study being applied to practical events. They also have the opportunity to clarify anything that they have found unclear. One student noted *“I really liked the panel style of the seminar and the interaction – I like it when you can ask the speaker questions directly”* (student, semester 2 2007 panel session). Other feedback from the panel presentations indicates the great benefit students attained from participating in this event, for example: *“I think it improved my presentation skills, and was good experience, learning to pitch a proposal to a different audience”* (student, semester 2 2007 industry panel presentation). Also, there were some suggestions from students that staff

could go even further to try to provide a more realistic assessment: *“I think we should have to make the events that are being presented more realistic – I don’t think we realised how much facilities and infrastructure actually cost”* (student, semester 2 2007 industry panel presentation). This feedback evidences how useful, practical and realistic the industry panel sessions have been for students.

Students also benefit enormously from the networking opportunities associated with industry guests. Those students that are invited to attend the networking lunch can talk on a one-to-one basis with the industry guests and ask questions about career plans and prospects, and get advice from the industry professionals about future employment opportunities as well as ask any other industry-related questions that they may have. Comments such as *“I liked hearing about the speakers’ experiences and the paths to their positions”* (student, semester 1 2008 networking lunch) and *“I did find the networking lunch worthwhile – I found it very helpful talking to the speakers”* (student, semester 1 2008 networking lunch) illustrate the importance of such events for students.

This simple networking lunch can form the basis of future communication between students and industry representatives, and this form of relationship building would be very difficult to engineer under normal circumstances. One student at the networking lunch suggested: *“I really enjoyed the opportunity to get to know the industry better in a casual environment”* (student, semester 1 2008 networking lunch) and another pointed out: *“It is a very competitive industry and to gain an advantage sometimes it can be more of who you know rather than what you know – it was great to be given the opportunity to meet with people already in the industry, to gain information and possibly even contacts for future use”* (student, semester 1 2008 networking lunch). This shows the importance of the informal nature of the networking lunch for providing invaluable relationship building opportunities for students.

There is evidence that students find such industry presentations to be motivating and that attendance at such functions can provide a stimulus to look for further opportunities to be involved, both at university and in the wider working world. For example, *“I found it inspiring and I think it challenged me to aim for what I want rather than settle for a job”* (student, semester 1 2008 industry seminar), *“I learnt that if you try and are dedicated you can get the positions you want”* (student, semester 1 2008 networking lunch) and also *“I learned that you have to take risks and be open for anything – you have to be patient and not lose faith in yourself”* (student, semester 1 2008 networking lunch). These are important life lessons for students that can't always be taught in a classroom.

One final, if unintended, benefit that students appear to derive from the networking lunches and seminars is the opportunity to meet other students studying the same course but at different year levels. There is a sense of community within the School of HTM and students from different year levels do have the opportunity to come together in a range of settings. However, as one student at the networking lunch pointed out: *“I find it difficult to network with people from the industry, but I did find myself chatting a lot with other students on the course, which I found to be equally worthwhile – they are all further on in the course than me so we discussed what is on offer and what I can expect from 2nd year onwards”* (student, semester 1 2008 networking lunch). Another student also identified the value of networking with other students: *“The networking lunch gave us a great opportunity to find out what other events students were doing, as well as providing valuable contacts for future business dealings within the industry”* (student, semester 1 2008 networking lunch). These comments suggest that there may be room for further interaction between students within the School of HTM and this is an issue that will be considered closely in future.

In conclusion, the students seem to have found the events useful and enjoyable: *“I think all events students would have benefited from it because I certainly did. Looking forward to the next one”* (student, semester 1 2008 industry seminar) and *“I thought it was really well*

done and would love to attend more in the future" (student, semester 1 2008 networking lunch).

INDUSTRY

For the industry representatives, there are a number of benefits associated with being involved with students and academic institutions. There are altruistic benefits and also more practical benefits.

For companies, particularly larger organisations, there is an element of altruism in the sense that industry wants to be involved with the next generation and would like to be seen to be contributing to education and developing young people. One industry speaker commented: *"always enjoy meeting tomorrow's industry!"* (industry speaker, semester 1 2008 industry seminar).

Probably the most important reason for industry getting involved in the classroom is to meet prospective employees. Students are able to sell their skills and talents to potential employers at such industry functions and although the aim of such events is not to provide a recruitment ground for companies, nevertheless students who impress industry representatives at such events will find that this stands them in good stead for their future career.

Industry too can benefit from relationship-building at such events, importantly not just relationships with students, but rather also with academic staff and with the whole university. In fact, one speaker suggested *"We need more opportunities for catching up with staff"* (industry speaker, semester 1 2008 industry seminar). Some individual speakers and companies return on several occasions as a result of the relationship that builds between the academics organising the events and the speaker themselves.

UNIVERSITY

The benefits that accrue to departments, schools and the broader university as a result of such industry collaborations are perhaps harder to define. Nonetheless, the strength of relationships that are built between academic staff and industry partners is an important sign of how well a university or academic institution is engaging with industry. VU is currently involved in a restructuring project 'Making VU A New School of Thought', which will see industry playing a greater role in the development of courses and will require students to be more active in industry as part of their degrees. In fact the Making VU project states that its aim is to make learning in the workplace and the community a universal feature of VU courses. This shows how vital links with industry are and underlines the importance of initiatives such as the industry involvement within the event management discipline.

STAFF

Having detailed the significant costs and challenges involved for staff in organising industry engagement opportunities for students, it would be remiss not to briefly mention the benefits that can directly and indirectly accrue as a result of these initiatives. Through incorporating industry speakers into the curriculum, not only do students benefit from a greater awareness of what is currently happening in industry, but teaching staff also gain from this knowledge, which they can integrate into their lessons to provide current examples of industry practice. It is important to remember that close links with industry are also vital for securing research funding and for sourcing research projects and therefore such relationships between industry and academics are likely to go well beyond simply attending student seminars.

As noted above, universities value external engagement and demonstrating effort in this area is often fundamental to seeking academic promotion. Academics that can

demonstrate proactive engagement initiatives, specifically designed to benefit key university stakeholders, are likely to be viewed favourably upon as part of a broader application detailing teaching and research success. Often, however, the more immediate reward is the positive feedback from students regarding these events and the associated knowledge that as teachers we are supporting their learning and career outcomes.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper has demonstrated that there are substantial challenges to organising a successful industry event in the classroom, however, in the collective experience of the teaching team, we believe the benefits of doing so make such initiatives 'worth the effort'. The time pressures that academics are subject to and the financial costs involved are challenges that schools and departments must face. In addition, the question of reliability of students and speakers is likely to remain an issue. However, the benefits to students and staff, as illustrated by the comments made by participants in the industry events, are evident. For students, these include the opportunity to network with industry guests, and to hear them speak; the increased contextualisation of learning; the 'reality check' or real life dimension that industry speakers can introduce; and the opportunities to mingle with students from other year levels. For academic staff, some of the benefits included developing and maintaining links with industry (important on a number of levels, including the possibility of working together to gain research funding) and the positive feedback from students who have enjoyed and learned from the experience. Finally, for the industry participants, the benefits encompass not only the opportunity to meet with academic staff and students (the workforce of the future), but the further possibility of having greater input into the development of academic units in order to make them potentially more relevant to industry.

The authors acknowledge that the foundations of this paper, evaluative data and the personal reflections of the teaching team, hinder generalisation of its findings to the broader literature on LiW. Nonetheless, it is argued that this paper has stimulated an interesting and worthwhile discussion on the costs versus benefits of engaging with industry in order to enhance student learning. Perhaps the contribution of this paper is best judged in terms of some of the 'lessons learned' or implications for teaching practice that fellow educators in event management and related fields can draw from it. In the experience of the teaching team behind this paper, organising successful industry events requires a team approach and the departmental support. Whilst one person might be primarily responsible for organising these events, input from colleagues regarding the content, theme and invited speakers, together with their role in actively promoting the value of these opportunities to students, ensures a broader groundswell of support for these events than could otherwise be generated by any one person working alone. Departmental support is also required to ensure adequate funding and administration resources for these events.

In initiating engagement with industry, building up a network of contacts is important in order to ensure access to industry speakers who are willing and able to engage with students one-on-one and in a lecture style format. This can often take time and in a diverse industry such as events, which incorporates venues, special events and business events amongst others, there is often a lack of clear starting points for doing so. The event management teaching team at VU makes a concerted effort to engage with industry through the membership industry associations (e.g. Meetings Events Australia), attendance at trade shows (AIME, RSVP) and as hinted in the paper, through our cohorts of graduating students who are working across industry in various roles. Former students are not only willing to return to the university and share their stories of career progression, but also often find that their message leaves the strongest impression on current students contemplating their immediate futures.

Finally, success builds on success. The initiatives documented in this paper are now permanent features of the student experience of event management education at VU. Word of mouth about previous industry events is a strong motivator for encouraging students to attend and engage with industry, whether it be in the seminar, networking lunch or industry panel format. Wherever possible the teaching team collects feedback from the participants, including students and industry guests, for the purpose of enhancing the quality of these events and using the positive feedback as testimonials for encouraging future participation.

Given that VU and other institutions are actively trying to instill LiW outcomes in their course offerings, it is hoped that the current paper will provide a foundation for future studies, employing more systematic data collection methods, across various universities. It would also be worthwhile examining what, if any, impact Generation Y is having on LiW practice to assess to the extent to which some of the current challenges of integrating industry engagement into degree courses are associated with the characteristics of this predominant student cohort.

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