

A Belbinesque Team-Diversity Manipulation Within a Compulsory Full-Time “Project- Based Learning” Year

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Abstract

Otago Polytechnic (OP) of New Zealand is one of five participating campuses, nationwide, delivering the Bachelors of Applied Management degree (B.App.Mgt. degree...since 2005, possibly New Zealand’s fastest growing undergraduate qualification, with six graduands in 2005, steadily growing to several hundred graduands in 2012). For years 2012 and 2013, OP is trialing a compulsory project-based learning (PBL - - see Thomas, 2000; Blumenfeld, Soloway, Marx, Krajcik, Guzdial, & Palincsar, 1991) approach. In the initial few years, PBL will be applied to the vast majority of material (or learning outcomes) contained in the eight compulsory courses in this degree’s first year (...noting four such courses are required of these management degree students each semester). This is very controversial in New Zealand, in that PBL, at least as the predominant mode of student learning assessment, is far more common in postgraduate, e.g., MBA, programs, or with primary school children. Empirical evidence for its use with 20 year olds has not surfaced. This paper makes an initial start at presenting some evidence. For the B.App.Mgt.’s delivery in Dunedin, New Zealand, 26 students were admitted and enrolled into the 2012 PBL year. Towards the end of the first semester, this first cohort completed a psychometric questionnaire that used pairs of items to assess each student’s self-perception of their affinity or competency, as appropriate, for each of 14 managerial or commerce-related attributes. These, in turn, were used, for the second semester, to create “competency-diverse” project teams (or Belbinesque teams, e.g, see Fisher, Macrosson, and Wong, 1998; Belbin, 1988, 2002; and our initial Literature Review section on Belbin team-roles herein). Since project team assignments for the first semester were done randomly, meaningful comparisons could be made across the mid-year point (i.e., pre-Belbinesque to post-Belbinesque).