

**Relationship between theories taught and study programmes and the practice period: Toward enhancing Problem Based Learning
(TTSP-PBL)**

"It is not the answer that enlightens, but the question."
Eugène Ionesco

1. Scientific summary

Problem based learning (PBL) model has now been acknowledged worldwide as a powerful tool that allows students, faculty members and industry practitioners engage in multi-disciplinary, collaborative and geographically distributed activities. The key word in the model is 'problem' – a problem that is correctly formulated eventually affects the process of learning. It is also linked to the intended outcome of the PBL based teaching, whereby students solve real life problems of companies and organizations.

As companies and organizations have various types of problems which might be attempted from different perspectives, it is pivotal that students have the opportunity to get equipped with a wide range of theoretical models and tools they can put into practice when they go through solving such problems. At the end of the day, the PBL based teaching is assessed based on the success of the problems solved, e.g., in the form of solution(s) provided, their creativity, innovation and applicability. Moreover, PBL-based teaching can identify theoretical gaps that are in need of development or require further interdisciplinary approaches.

One way to ensure the above outcomes is through interplay between theories taught and demands and needs of companies and organizations. This project investigates the relationship between theories taught and study programmes and the practice period at undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate levels across Aalborg University on one side, and the mental theoretical constructs used by entrepreneurs in solving problems associated with business development and growth on the other.

2. Objectives

In this project we side with Biggs and Tang (2007, p. 18) in that 'knowing what to do is important only if you know why, when and how you should do it'. These *why*, *when*, and *how* questions shed some light on the nature of the PBL-based teaching (<http://pbl.stanford.edu>). Specifically, these questions underscore the fact that PBL-based teaching is context specific. Holding this proposition true, the question then becomes how good we are as teachers in aligning systematically and constructively our teaching and learning activities to the needs and demands of businesses and organizations or of other external stakeholders.

For example, the current global economic crisis that is perceived as the worst of its kind since the Great Depression (Krugman 2008) affected large and small businesses and contributed to an overall decline of economic and entrepreneurial activities (GEM, 2009; OECD, 2010b). Furthermore, in the context of the current global economic crisis, Denmark dropped from 5th down to 9th in the global competitiveness ranking (www.weforum.org). However, the causes for this kind of downturn are exogenous, but also endogenous, rooted deeply in the Danish national economy (Confederation of Danish Industry, 2010). If status quo is preserved, OECD predicts further decline in GDP growth in Denmark, positioning Denmark at the low-end among OECD countries (OECD, 2010a).

During this kind of crisis, there could be witnessed significant declines in resources available to firms due to decrease in customer spending and lenders lending, as well as an increase of competitive rivalry (OECD, 2010b; Pearce and Michael 2006). Recessions also affect the behaviour of various stakeholders both economically and psychologically (Koksal and Ozgul 2007; Pearce and Michael 2006). At the end of the day, it is not all about spending less and/or cutting budgets; it is also about loss/decrease of confidence in trademarks, organizations, and governments; it is also about stress and panic induced among various stakeholders. Sudden shrink in resource munificence, coupled with decline in stakeholders' confidence, leads to diminishing margins. In such circumstances companies and organizations encounter decisions with regard to their growth and survival.

In line with the above, the question is whether we as teachers have our teaching and learning activities constructively aligned to the extant requirements and needs of businesses, organizations, and other stakeholders during such turbulent times. In this project we aim to develop a flexible framework that will span the university vertically and horizontally and that will contribute towards constructive alignment of teaching and learning activities as well as of the assessment tasks to the changing context of business and social environments.

This project will make inter alia use of partnerships with world-leading universities that actively employ or would consider employing PBL based teaching.

For more information about the project, including the opportunity to take part in it, please contact Romeo V. Turcan at rvt@business.aau.dk.

3. Main references

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