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The Impact of *Intensive Experiential-Based* Learning at First Year Level at a Private Higher Education Provider in South Africa: Midrand Graduate Institute (MGI)

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Overview:

Midrand Graduate Institute

- Based in Midrand, Johannesburg
- 20 Years in 2009
- Registered Private Higher Education Institution
- Degree conferring authority
- 5 Faculties, 15 CHE Accredited degrees
  - Commerce
  - IT
  - Creative Arts & Communication
  - Social Science & Law
  - Science
- Foundation program (MGI-Pre-Degree)

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Origins of the First-Year Experience (FYE) Movement

- The modern first-year experience (FYE) movement began in late 1970s
- Gained momentum in the 1980s,
- Flourished in the 1990s, continues today.
- Creation of first-year seminar at the University of South Carolina (USA) in 1972 by president Thomas Jones in response to a campus riot is perhaps most significant event leading to the FYE movement.

Understanding Expectations

- Business Community:
  - The business community increasingly demands universities to develop students who are able to think and act holistically

  (DeConick and Steiner, 1999).
- Students:
  - Students view their enrollment in University as an opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills that are necessary to succeed in the workplace and to advance their general knowledge and life skills

  (Carter, Bishop & Kravits, 2006)

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Understanding Expectations

- Students, Parents (cont'd…)
  - Flexibility and choice in the delivery of education
  - Access to cutting edge technology
  - A two way communication process between themselves and with the university
  - To be consulted about the learning experience
  - Accurate information about their courses, assessment procedures, complaints process, etc
  - Honesty with respect to whether their needs can be met or not

Davies (2002)

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Understanding Expectations

- Our job (at MGI) is to make sure that students know what to expect from the real world after they graduate
- What their chosen qualification will do for them
- “did you know that you will have to work with blood?”

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Understanding Expectations

- Government (DoE, SAQA, CHE, HEQC etc)
  - Broaden access
  - Improve throughput rates
  - Improve/Maintain standards
  - Comply with regulations
  - Meet the needs of business and society
  - Good Governance
  - *Etc…*

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Managing Expectations

- "HE has typically adopted an 'inside out' approach – with us on the inside assuming we know what students expect and want from HE.
- However, successful service industries have been shown to think 'outside in'.
- They research what customers expect of the service and then work to provide the service that meets those of customer expectations.

  (Sander, Stevenson, King, and Coates. 2000)
- Therefore, important for HEI's (especially Private HEI's) to focus at delivering what "stakeholders" expect (not only "customers")

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Understanding the role of the FYE in Meeting Expectations

First-year students succeed when they make progress toward:

- developing academic and intellectual competence,
- establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships,
- exploring identity development,
- deciding on a career and lifestyle,
- maintaining personal health and wellness,
- developing civic responsibility,
- considering the spiritual dimensions of life, and
- dealing with diversity.

Upcraft, Barefoot, and Gardner (2005)

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The Impact of the FYE on Student Retention

- There is a positive relationship between a positive First Year Experience and Student Retention
- A direct link exists between the quality and quantity of involvement in activities and students' academic performance and satisfaction.

  Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates, 2005
- When students are able to integrate the in-class and outside of-Class aspects of their lives, they reap great benefits. Simply put, students who learn are students who stay at an institution, or at the very least, stay engaged in higher education at the same or a different institution.

  Tinto, 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005
- Academic persistence is positively associated with University academic performance. Conclusion: Academic success at University contributes to the ability to persist while lower grades hinder the ability to persist in college.

  Lufi (2003)

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Facilitating Learning

- The educational context created by faculty influences student learning and engagement considerably.
- Students had greater engagement and learning when instructors:
  - used **active** and **collaborative learning** methods,
  - engaged students in **experiences**,
  - emphasized **higher-order cognitive skills**,
  - challenged students in academics,
  - interacted with students, and
  - emphasized activities for **enriching students' experiences**.

Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005)

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Facilitating Learning (Engagement)

- Classroom settings which provide opportunities and support for student interactions, computer technology and challenging tasks are helpful in promoting students' engagement with learning.
- Student interaction with peers and an understanding of the meaning of their performance in academics could contribute to engagement.

Farmer-Dougan, James, and McKinney (2000)

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Midrand Graduate Institute Market Day

- Faculty of Commerce Initiative
- Driven by Marketing Department
- Organised by lecturers
- Students are arranged in small groups (4-6 members)
- Takes place on Campus
- Real-World conditions are emulated
- Brief & evaluation criteria provided
- Support, mentoring, consulting, coaching, advising offered to students
- Students required to setup and run a business for a day

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Marketing Value (as a course)

- Marketing is a hands on business function
- Success of marketing depends (*inter alia)* on experience of what works and what doesn't
- Marketers need to influence/control their targets' perceptions, attitudes
- Marketing is simple to grasp in theory, difficult to apply

Key Characteristics of MGI Market Day

- Intensive
  - Very high Faculty expectations
  - Rigorous evaluation criteria based on
    - Creativity
    - Innovation
    - Effort
    - Marketing
    - Operations
    - Reporting
  - Risky
    - Risk of losing Initial financial investment
    - Risk of failing course
    - Social Risk
- Experiential
  - Hands on, practical application of theory
  - Real world emulated
    - Financial & Business Risk
    - Competition
    - Real products, services, customers

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MGI Market Day: A Key FYE

- Why is Market Day such a significant FY initiative?
  - Meets stakeholders expectations
    - Students:
      - Social
        - » Integrate
        - » Involved
        - » Participate
        - » Acceptance
      - Academic
        - » Facilitates learning (Action)

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Research

- Purpose
  - Determine the impact of MGI Market Day on students academic & social developement
  - Identify other benefits
- Method
  - Focus group interviews
  - 94 Students
  - 19 Groups

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Focus Group Interviews

- Categories
  - Academic Rewards
  - Social Benefits
  - Commercial Gain
  - Personal Development
  - Retention Value
  - Other Benefits

Findings: Academic Rewards

- The theory came to life, and it was easier to remember it during exam time. The principles stuck like they were common knowledge. *"It was like "déjàvu""*
- Common terms like uniqueness, creativity and innovation were better understood when they had to be applied and were used as evaluation criteria.
- It was easier to appreciate the value of the theory and how it connects to the real world.
- It was possible to learn other principles from Market Day that were also taught in other courses.

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Findings : Social Benefits

- Students were forced to interact with peers, thereby making friends, enemies, associates, acquaintances etc.
- Students were able to identify and distinguish between the hard workers and the free riders, which helped in making group members choices later on.
- Students were able to interact with students from other faculties as well as with second and third years.
- *“We were able to meet other people from our country and South Africa, so not necessary to be only friends with Angolans”*

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Findings : Commercial Gain

- Better understood competition, learned how to conduct business in a highly competitive environment.
- Learned the value of innovation, creativity, and uniqueness in a competitive environment.
- Learned the value of thorough research before attempting any risky project, and about the importance of proper financial planning (budgeting), control (cash handling), and trust issues when finances come into play.
- They learned about the importance of proper planning and all activities and allocation of tasks, and how to manage the project on the day of the event.
- They learned that simply being present did not bring the business in, and there was more to business than simply displaying products. It was essential to actively sell their products.
- They learned that they had to achieve a lot with very little.Students felt that after Market Day they understood that Business is *"not so easy as we thought"*
- *"We feel like we are more ready now to work in a company or start a business"*
- *"We understand finances and marketing in business much better now"*
- *"It is so difficult to please customers all the time"*

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Findings : Personal Development

- Students indicated that Market Day gave them the opportunity to display their character. Their stores, product choices, décor were a reflection of who they were.
- Students had the opportunity to deal with pressure, deadlines, risk; and to determine their likes, dislike, strengths, and weaknesses. There was a profound sense of self awareness taking place.
- Students reported that Market Day made them feel like mature adults, and the responsibility helped them prove to their peers, parents, faculty that they could achieve “something big”. There was a strong sense of achievement.
- Learned about time management and good planning

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Findings : Retention Value

"What role did MD play in your persistence?"

- Feel like a part of MGI now
- Students felt that this type of activity proved that MGI really cared about their development and education
- New found respect for their lecturers
- Understand business better now, so easier to grasp business concepts…
- Realise how important it is to have a degree
  - *("if **this project** was so difficult, I can only imagine how hard it must be out there without guidance, support and advice")*

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Findings : Other Benefits

- Students had the opportunity to make a profit.
- They also learned about dealing with risk.
- They were forced to organise themselves which required good teamwork, organisation skills, problem solving skills, and conflict resolution abilities.
- Learned what works and what doesn’t, and how it feels to potentially lose something (risk)
- Students were also pleased that they had the opportunity to judge other people’s character, and exercise leadership.
- A key benefit was that students were able to **make a contribution to the entire campus**, and prove to everyone that they were capable individuals. Students also learned the value of their degrees – without a degree, making it in business in near impossible.
- Some students also used the exposure, experience and opportunity from Market Day to continue their businesses, or start new ones.

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Findings : Other Benefits

- 2006-2007
  - 68.59% pass rate for Marketing 1
- 2007-2008
  - 81.12% pass rate for Marketing 1

(cannot statistically attribute the pass rate to MD exclusively, but qualitative analysis strongly suggests this)

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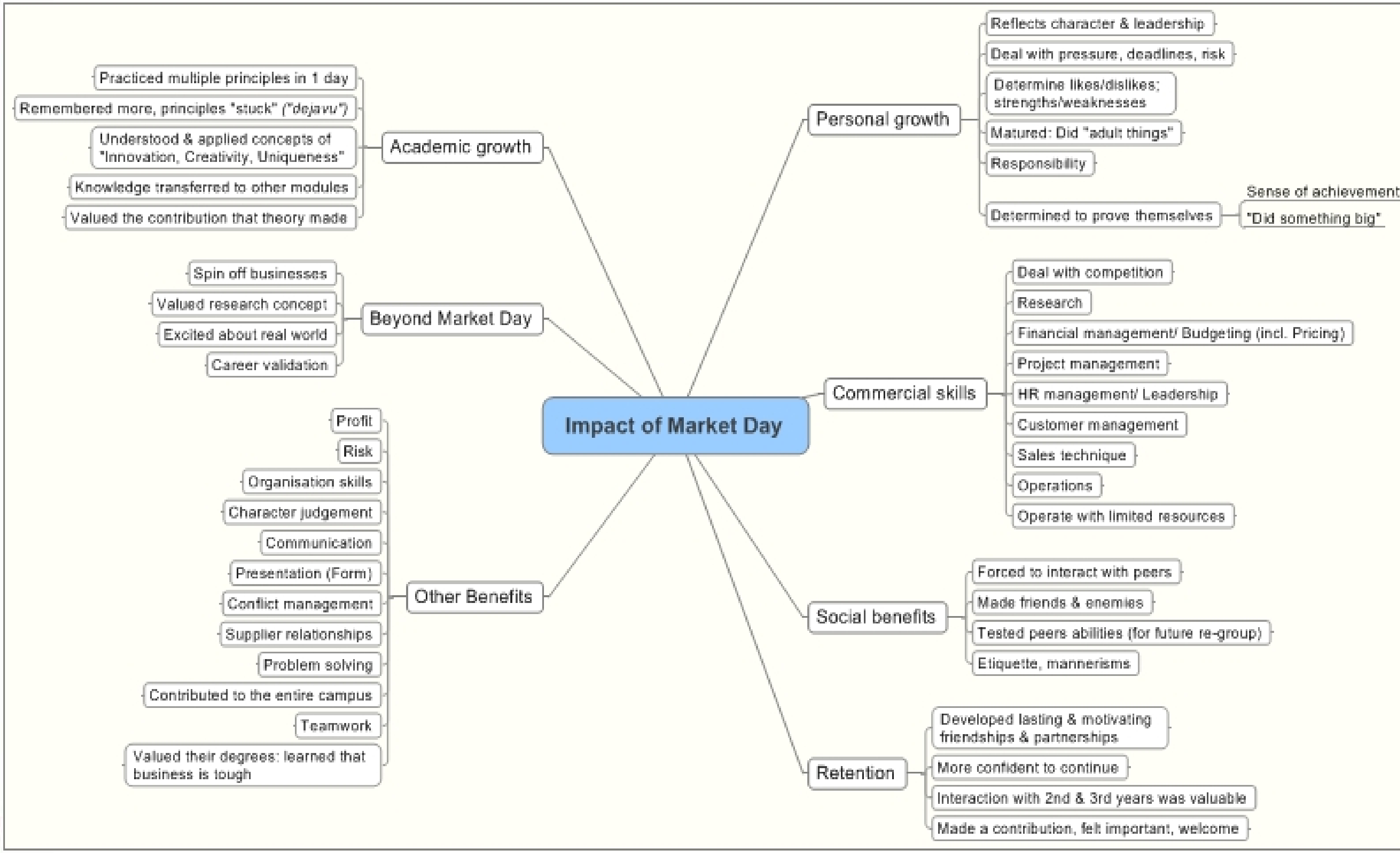

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Further Research/ Recommendations

- Try other similar activities/ simulations
- Quantitative evaluation of data (correlation analysis) as opposed to Qualitative reviews of self-reported surveys (isolate variables)
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Conclusion

- “Market Day” type activity is not a new concept at HE nor as a tool to support First Years
- Fairly new initiative at MGI (in this form (intensive))
- Value is immediately evident at MGI and serves many purposes
- Important for faculty to facilitate learning during this process, offer support, and keep pressure on. Essential for reporting process to kick in to allow for knowledge retention and alignment to theory.
- Success depends on degree of intensity (or risk counter-effect) and faculty & management support

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VEM COMER
(Stand A2)
VEM COMER
(COME AND EAT)

Potjie
warriors
Price:
Potjie: R10
SLUSH: R6
4B

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