

MGT8077 - Project Risk Management

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TITLE: An exploration of postgraduate management student engagement

PARTICIPANTS: 26 postgraduate students

CONTEXT: Project Risk Management (MGT8077) is a core course in the Master of Project Management. This program cohort primarily studies part-time and online. The StudyDesks are well set-up to enable anywhere, anytime learning and there are numerous multimedia resources to support learning. Traditionally, however, engagement in online text-based forums has been low, even when prompted and connections are made to assessment activities. Whilst student satisfaction scores and student grades are at acceptable levels, the lack of communication amongst the cohort and with the Course Examiner was of concern.

To address this concern, the Course Examiner decided to trial the use of some asynchronous tools to encourage greater student-to-student and teacher-to-student interaction. As a core course in the Master of Project Management program, it was believed that MGT8077 was well-suited to pilot the introduction of a selection of learning technologies with this program cohort.

Aim of the initiative

The aim of this project was to increase (meaningful) asynchronous engagement amongst the students and with the Course Examiner in the MGT8077 course using a range of learning technologies. Through this increase in interaction it was hoped there would be increased connectedness and sense of community amongst the students and with the Course Examiner.

Educational Technologies

Padlet and VoiceThread were introduced to increase the opportunities for the students to interact with one another and the Course Examiner regarding the course assessment tasks.

Adobe Spark was introduced to increase the Course Examiner's teaching presence and contribute to feeling connected with the teaching team.

The creation of H5Ps were designed to increase students' engagement with the course materials, provide students with immediate feedback on their progress in the course, and to inform students' choices regarding their learning journey.

Online engagement framework

The redesigned course included four key interventions to enhance student engagement based on Redmond et al's (2018) Online Learning Engagement elements which recognises the multiple ways students can engage in learning:

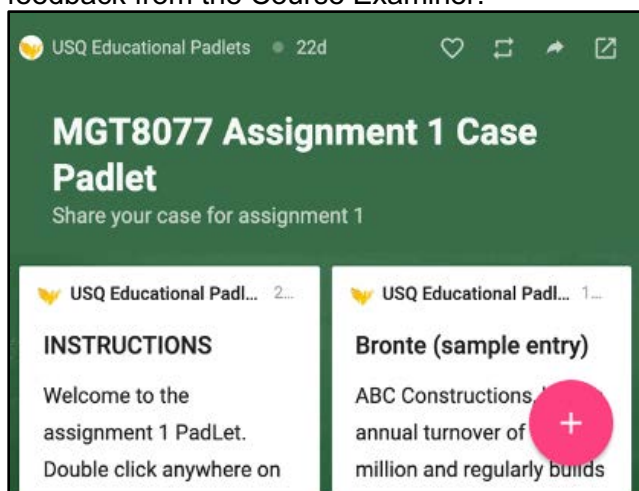
Intervention 1: Adobe Spark

Designed for the Course Examiner to build connection with the students through a series of mini-videos (between 1-2 mins each) to present instructions and guidance in each StudyDesk module, and present weekly wrap-ups on course material, activities and discussion.



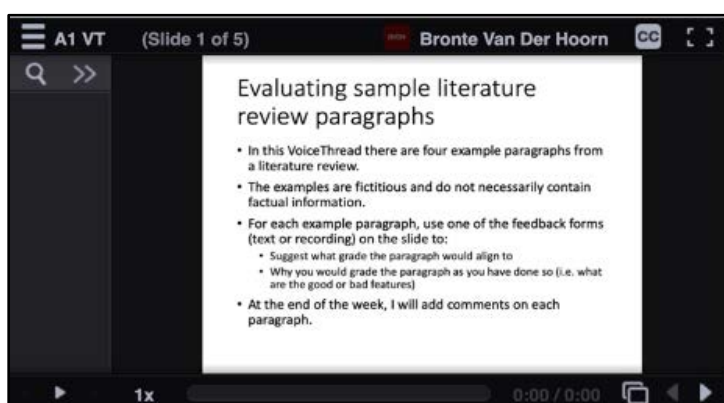
Intervention 2: Padlet

Designed for students to nominate and discuss their case assignments and receive feedback from the Course Examiner.



Intervention 3: VoiceThread

Designed for students to examine assignment guidelines and assessment criteria and seek feedback on their understanding of assessment requirements from their peers and the Course Examiner.



Intervention 4: H5P


Designed for students to undertake a series of short self-check quiz activities throughout the course to test their understanding of course content and assessment, and to determine their progress.


Self-check quiz: How am I going with the assessment?
 Take this quick self-check quiz (it doesn't count towards your grade!) to confirm that you are on track with your assignment... and building your risk management knowledge and skills!

I have a table in which I have about 4 articles per topic that I have classified as being highly relevant to both the assignment topic and my organisational context (if one or two of them are of medium relevance to the topic and/or organisational context, that's ok)

☐ Yes

☐ No





Project approach

The VoiceThread and Padlet were embedded within a learning journey that scaffolded students' completion of the assessment. For example, each week there were a series of learning activities to help students build their assignment. The VoiceThread and Padlet were activities within this structure.

The Adobe Sparks were embedded as either introductory content, wrap-up content, or as an 'aside' (tip) within the weeks' learning journeys. They provided a break from textual or other interactive content.

The H5Ps were strategically embedded as checkpoints in various weeks. For example, they followed the provision of course content and enabled the student to confirm whether they had sufficient understanding to proceed to the next learning activity.

Recognising that postgraduate students focus on what is assessed, the interventions focused on supporting students' completion of their assignments. Completion of the activities (i.e., making a post on Padlet) were not directly assessed, although the Course Examiner believed that engaging with these technologies would support students in successfully completing their assignment, and allowed the provision of asynchronous formative feedback.

Evaluation Method

A combination of learning analytics and an end-of-semester survey were used to evaluate the technologies and to understand the reason for student use (or otherwise). The analytics included views and use of the four technologies and the survey asked students to rate the impact of the technologies on aspects of their engagement and learning experience. The students were also surveyed regarding their preferred engagement methods and preferences for online learning.

Project impact

Padlet and VoiceThread were not effective in increasing peer-to-peer or peer-to-Course Examiner interaction. For example, whilst 13 (of 26) students accessed the Padlet, no students chose to use the opportunity to post about their assignment case and receive feedback from their peers or the Course Examiner. Views of the VoiceThread were also low, with the most views being with the first VoiceThread from 5 students within the cohort. Two students did, however, contribute to the first VoiceThread and these were students who were prompted by the Course Examiner to contribute in order to confirm the technology was working as expected.

The use of Adobe Spark and H5P, which did not require peer-to-peer or peer-to-Course Examiner interaction, was more promising. However, access to these technologies experienced significant drop-off over the course of the semester. For example, the first Adobe Spark was accessed by 12 students, the second by 10 students, but the final Adobe Spark was only accessed by 3 students.

In terms of the H5P quizzes, 20 students used the first four quizzes, but this dropped to 12 students by the sixth quiz, and the last quiz was only accessed by 5 students.

These analytics can be better understood when considering the student survey responses (n=25; with only one student choosing not to submit a response) which revealed their learning preferences. When asked questions relating to whether a StudyDesk should meet all learning needs without, firstly engagement with the Course Examiner, and secondly engagement with their peers, no students disagreed or strongly disagreed. All responses to this question were neutral (3 and 8 respectively) or agree or strongly agree. This suggests that students felt that a StudyDesk should not mandate that they engage with the Course Examiner nor their peers as part of the learning experience. Furthermore, when the students were asked directly about their preferred channels for engagement, traditional methods such as StudyDesk forums, synchronous drop-in sessions and email were nominated. Some student responses to this question indicated that they would prefer not to engage with the Course Examiner (n=3) or their peers (n=9).

While these quantitative insights indicate a large number of this cohort do not seek peer and Course Examiner engagement as a priority, some qualitative feedback also supports these postgraduate students wanting privacy regarding their learning journey. Comments such as,

"I didn't like the padlet - I felt this required me to share details about my project that I was not willing to share due to project confidentiality. I would rather discuss project concepts and leave my actual project details to assignment" and "I found the padlet to not be as useful as the mini videos, quizzes" illustrate students making decisions about the appropriateness and/or value of some of the technologies.

Also of interest is the fact that a few students commented on not even being able to 'find' the technologies, thus suggesting that they did not utilise any of the technologies that had been introduced to scaffold students' learning experience throughout the semester. This correlates with the survey question regarding use of the learning journey, where only 7 students indicated that they used the learning journey on a week by week basis, with the remainder not using it at all (i.e., choosing to access resources directly rather than in the prescribed format), or using some of the learning journey and some activities. In summary, this cohort appears to prefer a learning experience which affords choice and autonomy, affords them privacy in their study, and does not mandate or require their interaction (unless they want to) with peers or the Course Examiner.

This Technology Demonstrator project provided an opportunity for confirming anecdotal knowledge of the student cohort which can inform future StudyDesk renewal. It supports the cultivation of evidence-based decision-making as it relates to course design.

The project also offered a supportive opportunity to build skills in the use of technologies and provided a collegial forum to discuss their affordances.

The outcomes of the evaluation have provoked my reflection (as Course Examiner) on students' perceptions of online learning, and how this aligns with or challenges my own teaching practices, as well as the expectations of tertiary institutions.

In conclusion, while these postgraduate management students identified that they enjoyed the multimedia components of MGT8077 that used H5P and Adobe Spark, their preference is for course designs that do not require them to actively engage with either their peers or the Course Examiner (unless they choose to do so).

Recommendations

- The inclusion of Adobe Sparks in other courses to provide quick videos which contextualise, make links to workplace practice or provide useful tips relating to learning
- The inclusion of H5Ps in other courses as a way for students to receive immediate asynchronous feedback on their progress and to make decisions on their learning journey

- VoiceThread and Padlet will not be used as piloted in this course. Padlet may continue to be used in synchronous sessions with students

Adobe Spark

- An effective tool for quickly creating mini-videos (that don't require a 'face to camera' record) which can enhance teaching presence.
- Leverage design controls in Adobe to create a consistent look and feel for the videos in a course.

Padlet

- Using Padlet in a course requires a cohort who *want* to share information about themselves and/or their learning (and to connect with peers) in a classroom environment. If a cohort is not doing this in traditional forums, this project showed that changing the technology did not guarantee a change in students' online behaviour or greater engagement.

H5P

- Consider how you can create questions that are quick to answer but probe for understanding.
- Provide constructive feedback for incorrect answers to enable this tool to be an effective tool that supports formative assessment.

VoiceThread

- My recommendation echoes that of Padlet (as above). To use VoiceThread effectively, a course requires a cohort who are willing to share information about themselves and/or their learning (and to connect with peers) in a classroom environment. If a cohort is not doing this in traditional forums then changing the technology will not necessarily guarantee a change in students' behaviour or engagement in a course.

General Recommendations

- Ensure you are fully aware of any sign on/authentication requirements related to technologies and how this impacts anonymous versus named contributions.
- Be mindful of the technicalities of StudyDesk analytics, i.e., there may be trade-offs in terms of interactivity versus collection of analytics data.
- Consider surveying cohorts before implementing technologies to appreciate their learning preferences.