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Enriching BSI's understanding of collaborative behaviours in virtual environments

BSI Student Research Programme Case Study

University of
Strathclyde
Glasgow

BSI's Student Research Programme works collaboratively with Master's Degree students to help them produce a research dissertation.

Di Pu, a Master's student at the University of Strathclyde, produced an MSc dissertation on collaborative behaviours in virtual environments.[1]

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Di Pu

What is the BSI Student Research Programme?

BSI's Student Research Programme exists to bring Master's students into a mutually beneficial relationship with BSI. These students are required to produce research dissertations. Meanwhile BSI often needs original research in areas that are identified as having potential for future standards or standardization work. The SRP brings the two together.

Through this collaboration BSI gains valuable insights into an area of interest which might ultimately enrich our standards. Meanwhile students benefit from business mentorship; a potential real-world application for their dissertation; access to standards, subject experts and networking opportunities; and a close association with BSI which may ultimately increase future employability.

Interested to learn more?
Email us at education@bsigroup.com

[1] Pu, D (2018.) Collaborative behaviours in virtual environments, submitted for the MSc in Business Analysis & Consulting, University of Strathclyde

Di Pu

Introduction

Strathclyde Business School (SBS), a part of Strathclyde University, is the top business school in Scotland[2] and one of the most innovative and largest of its kind in Europe. Di Pu was studying there for a one-year MSc in Business Analysis and Consulting when she became aware of BSI's Student Research Programme.

Her course required Di to do a three-month dissertation project – preferably for an external organization and one which involved a real-world business challenge. BSI has built a relationship with the SBS and consequently submitted a couple of dissertation project proposals for MSc students to consider.

Out of around 60 project outlines, Di chose a BSI project called "Collaborative behaviours in virtual environments". She picked this project firstly because she had a pre-existing interest in

knowledge management, and felt this topic was related. As well, she felt that in comparison with most of the other projects on offer, this one looked "adventurous." "It called for the exploration of something which is something of an unknown," she says. Most compelling of all, Di intended to look for a role in consulting when she completed the course and this project offered a genuine consulting opportunity. "BSI would be my client, they had a real-world issue and it would be my role to find out what they were looking for and answer their questions."

Scoping the project

BSI shaped the project. As the UK's National Standards Body we rely on the input of around 12,000 committee members who volunteer their time to help write standards. This is done collaboratively in working groups; drafts are then circulated for feedback to a committee of experts and some wider communities, before a consensus document is agreed. BSI wanted to research the impact of online collaboration on this process.

Consequently Roz Hitchcock, Solutions Development Manager at BSI, had drafted the research project's parameters. "We wanted to know," she says, "if we take out the time and

expense of physical meetings and replace those with virtual meetings, what happens? How does it affect participants' motivation and ability to collaborate, as well as the impact on group dynamics?" BSI needed to understand the impact on committee members in order to support them appropriately to ensure the process remains inclusive and the resulting output stays robust and free from bias. The results of the research project would inform a wider programme which is looking at ways BSI should be evolving its standards development process.

Writing the dissertation

The project began with Di spending a day and a half at BSI's headquarters in Chiswick, London. This gave her the opportunity to clarify the scope, gain a clear understanding of BSI's situation and to see our standards development process at first hand.

She initially thought the task was to research an existing problem in BSI and make recommendations. However, after the first meeting, it emerged that BSI wanted to research external methodologies we could draw on. Says Di, "This was a very wide piece of research on what is happening now. It was still about

knowledge management, but with more focus on what kind of communications methods achieve knowledge communication and knowledge sharing."

Di then produced her project plan, which turned out to be the most critical stage of the project. "I had to grasp the nature of the challenge and their thinking about behaviour, so BSI really helped me with scoping the problem at that initial stage." Adds Roz Hitchcock, "The process of going back and forth over the project plan helped both of us to be really clear about what was wanted."

[2] Based on the REF (Research Excellence Framework) 2014 GPA scores

Outcomes of the partnership

Reflecting on the project and what she got out of it, Di says that in her course, students were usually given specific, clear-cut problems. "The BSI project," she says, "was a new experience because I needed to figure out what questions to ask and this is where I gained the most: from working with the client and asking the right questions."

Moreover, Di enjoyed the process of communication and collaboration with her client and was pleased that BSI gave her the space to expand her methodology. "This was not something I'd had the chance to do in the business school before and it's not in the text book. It was really important practical training," she says, adding: "I learned how to interact and collaborate with a client in an open-ended situation and I think this experience was very valuable."
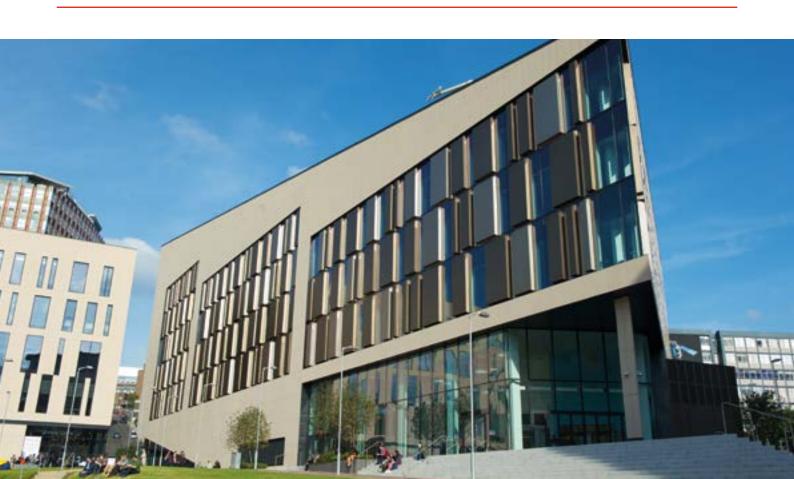
The project was also part of BSI's ongoing Agile Development Programme. Roz Hitchcock says that she's gained a really good research report which will be "hugely valuable" to BSI. "We've got a fresh perspective from someone not embedded in standardization. Its recommendations will help us move forward with the project and gives us support to build a business case."

Finally, would Di recommend that future postgraduates sign up for a research project with BSI? She says that going by her experience, the answer is "Yes". She concludes: "They are a real and very good client who are very good with feedback, resources and information, as well as being open and welcoming. If you prefer to do deep research with more structure it may not be for you, but otherwise I highly recommend it."

"Collaborating with BSI was a tremendously positive experience for Di. Working on a real-life business project really challenged her thinking and motivated her to produce a high-quality piece of research."

Dr Viktor Dörfler,
Senior Lecturer in Information & Knowledge Management,
University of Strathclyde Business School

What students gain from BSI's Student Research Programme:

✓ Additional support and impetus in defining and producing their Master's dissertation

✓ Kudos of association with BSI

✓ Networking opportunities

✓ Commercial perspective to the dissertation

✓ Exposure to future potential employers

✓ Access to BSI resources (including standards and committee experts)

About BSI Standards Development

A standard is an agreed way to do or make something. Standards gain their authority from the fact that they're written through a process of wide consultation which leads to an expert consensus. BSI Standards Development develops new ideas to provide the standards that industry needs to innovate, expand and excel.

About BSI Education

Universities make a significant contribution to standardization by teaching about standards, participating in their development on committees, and contributing academic research. BSI Education builds relationships and creates programmes that raise awareness of the role of standards and encourage and increase the participation of young professionals in standards-making.

For more information about BSI's Student Research Programme and how to get involved, go to bsigroup.com/education **or contact** education@bsigroup.com.

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