Learning Service Leadership through Service-Learning:

Anxieties, Opportunities and Insights

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Background

- Lingnan University (LU) is one of 8 tertiary institutions in Hong Kong that have received sponsorship for research and development on programmes that provide undergraduate students with opportunities to acquire knowledge and develop qualities and attributes relating to service leadership.

Key features of Service Leadership

- In today's service-driven economy, people cannot expect to achieve **leadership** without providing **service** (Gronfeldt & Strother, 2006, p.6)
- Service leadership implies collective leadership acts, with organizational members **sharing responsibility** (Gronfeldt & Strother, 2006, p.6)

Our Definition of Service Leadership

- The sincere pursuit, as a leader, of the core purpose of serving society and/or of contributing to well-being and development for others, through collaboration with the people involved, while also engaging in moral self-cultivation.
- In short, "**leadership FOR service**"

Research aims

1. To understand how students may come to acquire knowledge and **develop qualities and attributes** of service leadership through undertaking service-learning projects.
2. To explore how service-learning projects can be effectively **designed** and supported for greater beneficial impact on students' knowledge acquisition and development of service leadership qualities and attributes.

Key Features of Service-Learning

- Academic **partnerships** that provide opportunities for students to learn while providing a service to a designed community (Foss et al, 2003) .
  - **Reciprocity** (mutual benefit) between academic institution and community agency

- **Alignment** of learning goals and service goals
  - Compatibility between the goals of the University, the students and the service recipients.

Conditions for effective service-learning partnerships

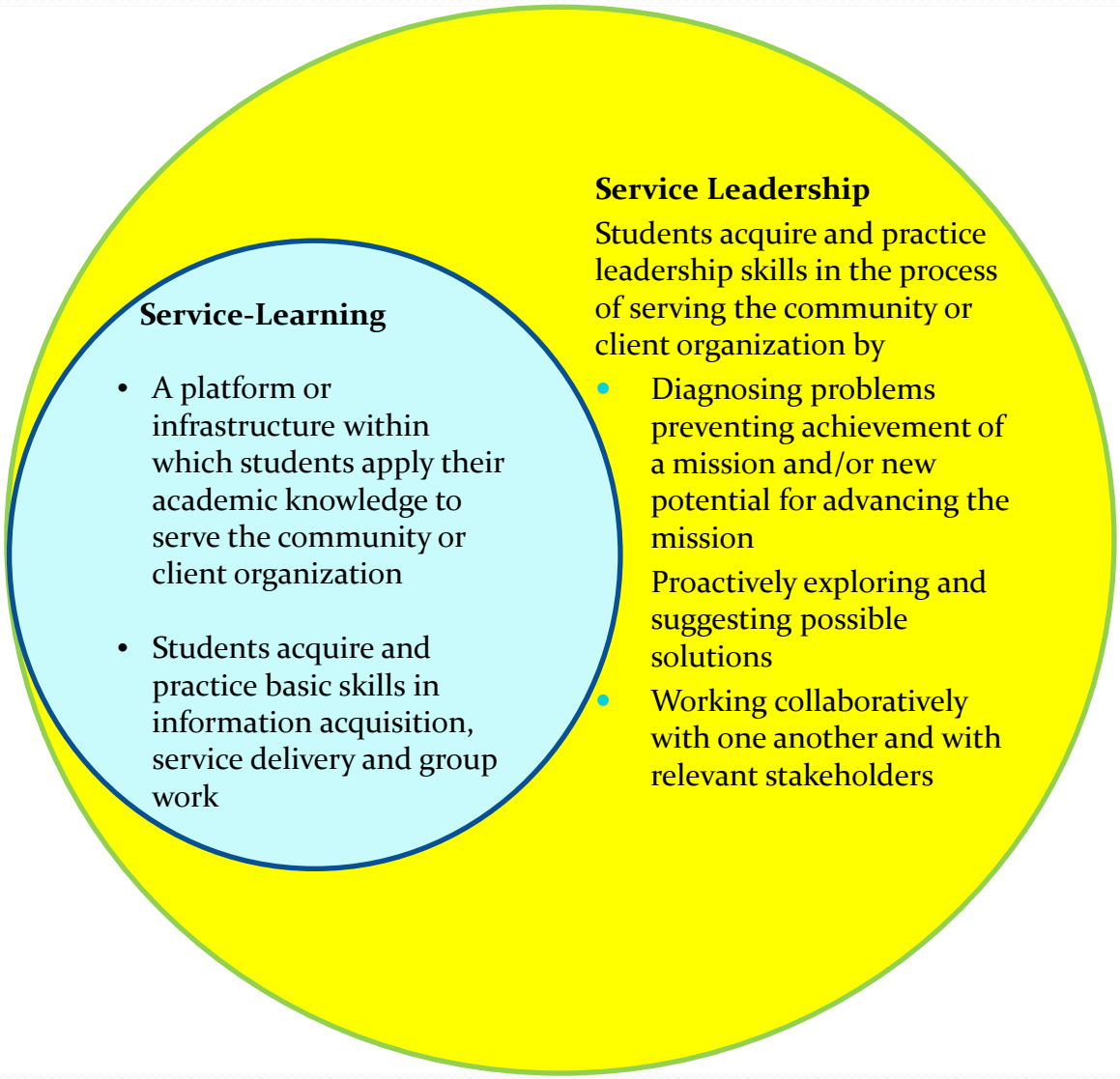
- Bringing the community partner into the planning process, and including them in class-room sessions, are effective ways to create reciprocity and collaboration (Rimmerman, 2009, p.32).

- Mutual trust and respect (Ferman, 2004)

Our “Ideal” Social Enterprise Partner

- **Interested in** and **open-minded** about new ideas (despite resource constraints)
  - Willing to trust the students as credible sources of ideas
  - Welcome intellectual help (not just extra pairs of hands)

What are the similarities/differences between service leadership & service-learning?



Affinity with action learning

- Action learning principles (Bourner, 1996; Raelin, 2006; Pedler, 2011) are also relevant to LU's attempts to provide service leadership development opportunities to students through course-embedded service-learning projects.
- Learning = P + Q (Revans, 1984, p.6, Zuber-Skerritt, 2002).
- Programmed knowledge + Questioning insight

Research Gap

- The purpose of action learning is to help managers learn how to handle more effectively new **management situations** (Leonard, D. C., 2002)
- Since 1997 there has been a substantial growth of action learning activity in both **corporate** and **academic** contexts (Pedler, 2011, p.xxiv).
- There are also increasing academic interests for research and consulting and also demands for more practice-oriented **postgraduate programmes** (Pedler, 2011, p.xxiv).
- Action learning based designs are not a predominant feature of undergraduate education and therefore the amount of research in this area has been limited.

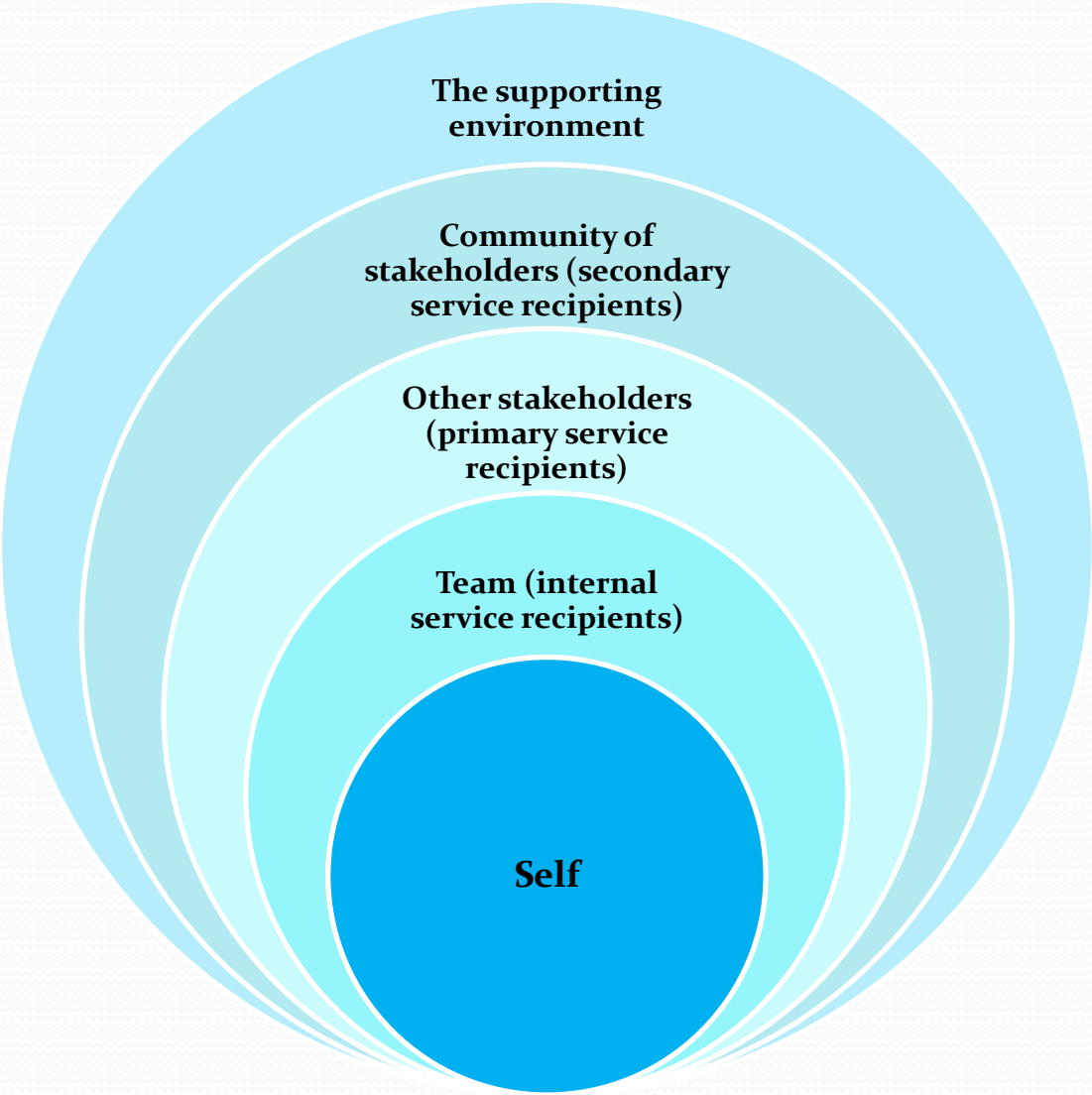
Research Gap

The design and support of service-learning projects

- (Implicit) “Action learning” based design
- Collaborative learning environment
  - Collaboration with the social enterprise
  - Collaboration between instructor and OSL
  - Collaboration between students
- Intensive social interaction requirements
  - F-2-F meetings at each level of collaboration
  - Electronic communication can be useful but cannot substitute for F-2-F.

Service Leadership Traits	Their Expression/Application
1. Responsiveness to others	Fostering positive relationships that help satisfy others' needs
2. Actively listening to others	Showing respect to others and coming to understand their ideas and concerns
3. Anticipating and solving problems	Detecting and defining problems; identifying and proposing salient solutions to realize project goals
4. Caring disposition	Taking positive action to addressing another's physical/emotional needs
5. Shows originality in expressing opinions	Offering original and constructive opinions to improve performance
6. Contribution to cohesiveness and close relationships	Fostering the development of unity, cohesiveness and close relationships in the team or with service recipients
7. Commitment to continuous improvement	Striving to improve one's service leadership competencies and atttributes
8. Undertaking delegated responsibilities	Delivering service against promises made to others, e.g. one's team, a service recipient, etc.
9. Civic engagement	Striving to make a difference to society through the project

The impact of service leadership



Research questions

- How do students' accounts of their own learning outcomes/ areas of personal development match the anticipated service leadership qualities?
  - Areas of unconscious learning need identified by peers
  - Areas of conscious learning need
  - Areas of conscious competence
- How can the service-learning/leadership activities be effectively designed and supported to have the most beneficial impact on the students' learning of service leadership attributes?

Methodology

- Qualitative interviewing
- Document analysis (of self reflection reports)
- Observation in class (not as yet in the field)
- In-depth, fine-grained approach to the investigation
  - Seeking rich examples and explanations of positive and negative learning experiences of students when undertaking service leadership through service-learning projects.

Data Collection through Rubrics

- In Term 1, 2012-13, **122 students** undertook projects on Service Leadership through Service-Learning.
- All students (56) on Social Marketing and most students on Services Marketing (9) and on Leadership and Teamwork (22) completed an open-ended individual **self-reflection rubric/proforma.**
- Nearly all students also completed forms to **rate their peer team members**' service leadership behaviours and to provide descriptions of their contributions and areas for improvement.

Data Collection through interviews

- Profile of interviewees/focus group members
  - 14 female students and 3 male students (Total : 17).
  - Among the 14 female students, 7 of them had been conveners of the projects.
  - Among the 3 male students, 2 of them had been conveners.
- Courses Studied (and students studying)
  - 4 had studied **CSR** (out of 32)
  - 2 had studied **Services Marketing** (out of 11)
  - 9 had studied **Social Marketing** (out of 56)
  - 2 had studied **Leadership and Teamwork** (out of 23)
- 11 different service leadership by service-learning projects were referred to by interviewees.

MAIN FINDINGS

Selection Criteria (for conveners)

They appeared to others to already possess the following leadership attributes

- They had taken **initiative** in the following areas:
  - forming the team
  - in answering questions
  - in communicating with team members
- They were perceived as **'responsible'** people (committed, willing to invest energy in the project)

Main Preoccupations of Conveners

- Time management (e.g. issuing reminders)
- Building relationships in the team (e.g. social activities)
- Improving relationships with team members (conflict resolution)

Is this sufficient?????

Problems, Anxieties, Difficulties

Students reported:

- Communication problems
- Difficulties in accessing the site/people
- Timelines too tight
- Scheduling problems
- Free-riders

We also identified these problems

- Deep anxieties when handling the unexpected
- Over-dependency on conveners

Service Leadership Skills/Qualities	Key reported learning outcomes
1. Taking the initiative; being responsive to others	Able to rise to the occasion during a presentation (Conscious competence)
2. Actively listening to others	
3. Anticipating and solving problems	Became aware of the need to be prepared to adapt when faced with unexpected constraints (Conscious learning need)
ditto	Able to remain calm and patient when facing a crisis (Conscious competence)

Service Leadership Skills/Qualities	Key reported learning outcomes
4. Caring disposition	Aware, from being on the receiving end, that giving appreciation to someone has a big impact on his/her morale (Conscious learning need)
ditto	Able to help service recipients feel at ease in the service relationship (Conscious competence)
5. Shows originality in expressing opinions	
6. Contributions to cohesiveness and close relationships	Aware, from being upset when working with team members, of the need to improve one's own EQ (Conscious learning need)

Additional Service Leadership Skills/Qualities	Key reported learning outcomes
Influencing one's group	Aware of the need to increase one's own communicative impact on team members (Conscious learning need)
ditto	Able to use humour to lighten the mood in a team (Conscious competence)
ditto	Able to remain patient and to work toward consensus through giving explanations (Conscious competence)
Coordinating information	Able to coordinate teamwork; combine knowledge with team members (Conscious competence)

Skills/Qualities in Other Areas	Key reported learning outcomes
English editing skills	Able to improve the grammatical accuracy of draft reports written in English by other team mates. (Conscious competence).

STUDENTS' DEVELOPMENT

Conscious competence

Key development for Student 3 was his ability to rise to the occasion during a presentation

"During the first presentation…. session, suddenly we were called upon to present. The English of our leader might not be that good.

When she stopped suddenly during the middle of presentation, I immediately took up the microphone and started to present.

The professor showed appreciation about the clarity of my presentation."

(Student 3, Member, project team 2)

Conscious learning need

Student 1 of project team 1 became aware of the need to increase communicative impact on team members after repeated attempts to motivate teamwork.

“ The [convener]… is very systematic and would remind the team members about deadlines. (But) she may be too soft in her communication approach. And I would act to be more direct and strong. But still no one paid attention to me.

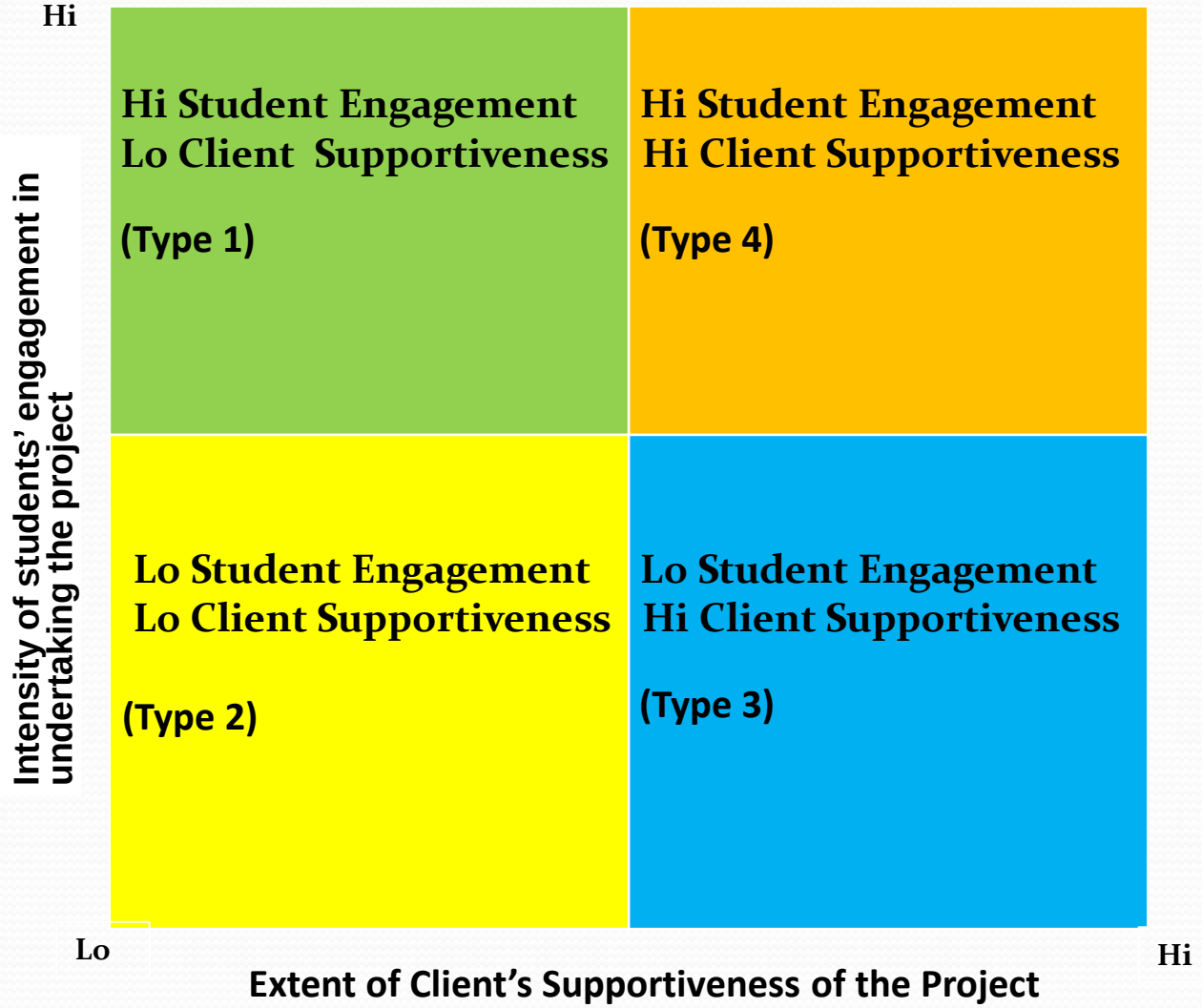
(Student 1, Member, project team 1)

Unconscious learning needs

Student 1 of project team 1 became aware of the need to increase communicative impact on team members after repeated attempts to motivate teamwork.

Student 1 has identified a conscious learning need. She implies that the free-riders, who had little engagement in the project work might have **learning needs but remain unaware of them.**

The Client Supportiveness – Student Engagement learning matrix



Type 1

- Low Client Supportiveness and High/Medium Student Engagement

Project team 3: Low Client Supportiveness and High/Medium Student Engagement

- In this case, the students tended to identify with the needs of the end-users but not with the social enterprise.
- The social enterprise was perceived by students to be at the low end of supportiveness.
- If the students had been able to address needs of the social enterprise as well, the relationship with them might have been better maintained.

Type 2

- Low Client Supportiveness and Low Student Engagement

Project team 1 : Social Enterprise A- Low Client Supportiveness and Low Student Engagement

Low Client Supportiveness	Low Student Engagement
"We did not communicate with them about the difficulties. We put effort to talk to them and it seemed that they did not listen to us well. They were in fact friendly, only that they might not have any task for us." (Student 1, member, project team 1) Low level of project alignment with felt client need and with course content	**"I felt tired and frustrated as it was difficult to move them to work. At the later-half stage, they tended to react very slowly.** **The day before the presentation, I reminded them to read the prepared PowerPoint slides at least.** **They only took action in the final presentation when I provided them with the PowerPoint slides, but then they would ask what they had to say." (Student 2, Convener, project team 1)**

Project team 1 : Low intensity of students' engagement

- "In fact, we find out that their website is very simple and the service is valuable but they lack marketing to promote the value. We find the new service meaningful. We also thought that we could promote, but the company did not think so." (Student 1, Member, project team 1)

✖ **Moderator : Level of client trust in the institutional partnership**

Project team 1 : Low intensity of students' engagement

- "We thought that it was infeasible as they only made the arrangement in November. They only provided us one day's time to teach them. It was impossible as the staff were low in education and income. It is impossible to teach them in a day." **(Student 1, Member, project team 1)**

✖ Low level of identification with the social enterprise and its community (staff)

It is important to align the project with course learning goals

Some students reported that they were only able to understand the requirements of the project at a late stage of the project period and this confusion appeared to affect their engagement with the project work as they had been uncertain of how to proceed.

It is important to align the project with course learning goals

- If the students felt uninterested in the project as it had been defined or if they felt that undertaking the project work could not help them learn (for the course), they tended to withhold their effort to participate in the project, causing difficulties in team work.
- The extent of alignment between course learning goals and project definition tends to **moderate** the effects of client supportiveness on student engagement in the service provision to the social enterprise.

Type 3 : High Client Supportiveness and Low Student Engagement

- With the students working in teams, even if some members were free-riders and had low engagement in the project, other members in the team and in particular the appointed convener appeared to take up more work in order to meet the requirements of the project.
- In such cases, if there is high/medium client supportiveness, the team may still be able to complete the project to a sufficient standard.

Type 4 – Situation 1 (Matched)

- High Client Supportiveness and High Student Engagement

Project Team 11: Social Enterprise H– High Client Supportiveness/High Student Engagement

High Client Supportiveness	High Student Engagement
"Our team does not have a similar problem (as Team 1). The social enterprise knows our deadlines and they can usually respond in the same day or just next day to our e-mail. During the site visit, they know our schedule, for example, for sending any materials or proposals, so they may pay attention to the schedule. For special occasions when we need help from them or send important messages to them, they could reply to us very quickly." (Student 16, Leader, project team 11)	"For the social enterprise, we need to run classes to teach information technology skills. We teach the participants to use a computer to search for useful information e.g. through Facebook. We hope that they can learn by themselves later on. We teach them how to gain access to the internet and learn how to search for the required information. As they are old people, they lack computer knowledge. We try to help them how to search for the useful information." (Student 16, Leader, project team 11)

High responsiveness

High identification with social enterprise community (end-users)

Type 4 – situation 2 [but mismatched due to lack of ongoing communication with client]

- High Client Supportiveness and High Student Engagement [but disappointing outcomes]

Project team 7 : High/Medium Client Supportiveness and High Student Engagement (but mismatched)

- At the start of the project, the social enterprise showed support by advising the students about their expectations.
- In the end, however, the students produced some outcomes reflecting what interested them without consulting the social enterprise.
- They did not make further contact with the social enterprise. The social enterprise also stopped following up the students' work.
- The social enterprise felt that the students did not produce anything helpful to them.

The need for maintaining close and regular communication between partners

CONCLUSIONS

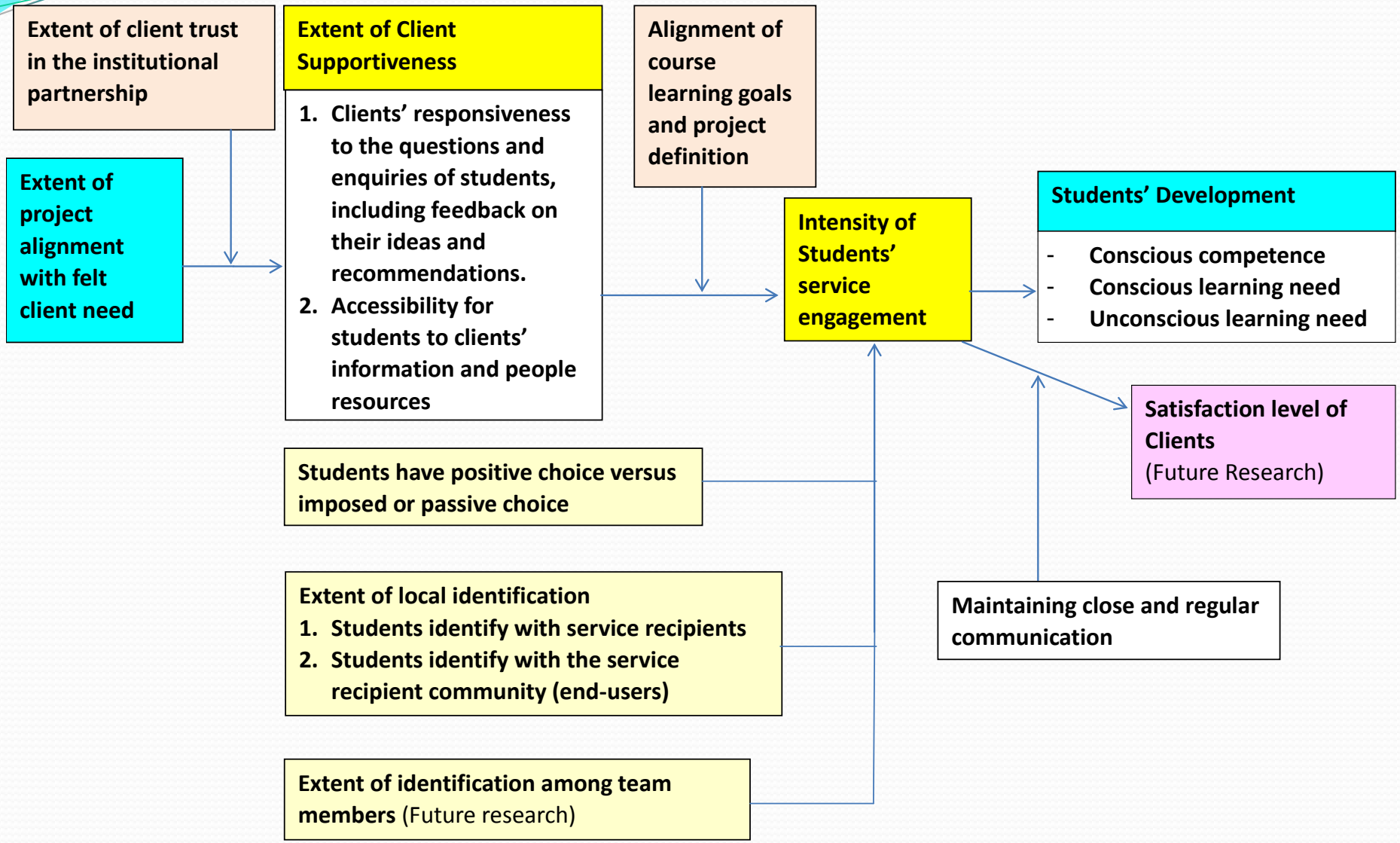
Critical factors for students' successful engagement

- Client organizations need to be supportive of the project.
- The project must address client's genuinely felt needs.
- Students need to be primed to be proactive in framing and pursuing project goals.
- There needs to be alignment between course learning goals/content and the project definition.

Critical factors for students' successful engagement

- The focus of the project needs to be clear to students and the client organization.
- Students' need to be primed to stand in the shoes of the client social enterprise, not only end-users.
- There needs to be a requisite level of trust between students, service recipients and academic facilitators.
- There needs to be close and regular communication with the client organization to maintain alignment between its needs and the project.

Salient Factors in Promoting Students' Development



Contributions of the research

- Empirical evidence to illustrate the importance of integrating three areas of learning theory when designing and supporting service leadership projects
- In order to maximize student learning and development of service leadership insights and qualities, the learning design needs to combine **action learning** + **collaborative learning** + **inter-organizational learning**.
- If this is not fully integrated, learning impact and client satisfaction may be reduced.

Ideas for Future Research

- How students apply aspects of Service Leadership that they have learned while at LU to the practitioner field after graduation (longitudinal).
- Payoffs and motivators for the course instructors
- The extent to which client managers in service recipient organizations are satisfied with:
  - (a) the service propositions arising from the projects
  - (b) contact and collaboration with LU

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