

Learning by Doing: University of Tennessee Rethinks How It Teaches Contracting

The Problem

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; *teach* a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

In most cases, this proverb rings true. However, contracting courses taught in a traditional classroom and continuing education credit settings often fall short. Simply put, they teach concepts, but do not allow for the “practice” of the concepts in a real setting. The University of Tennessee (UT) set out to change this.

Approach and Solution

UT researchers have been lauded for their research in outsourcing best practices. Their work has led to six books and comprehensive online and in-class courseware programs to teach *and implement* the Vested methodology.

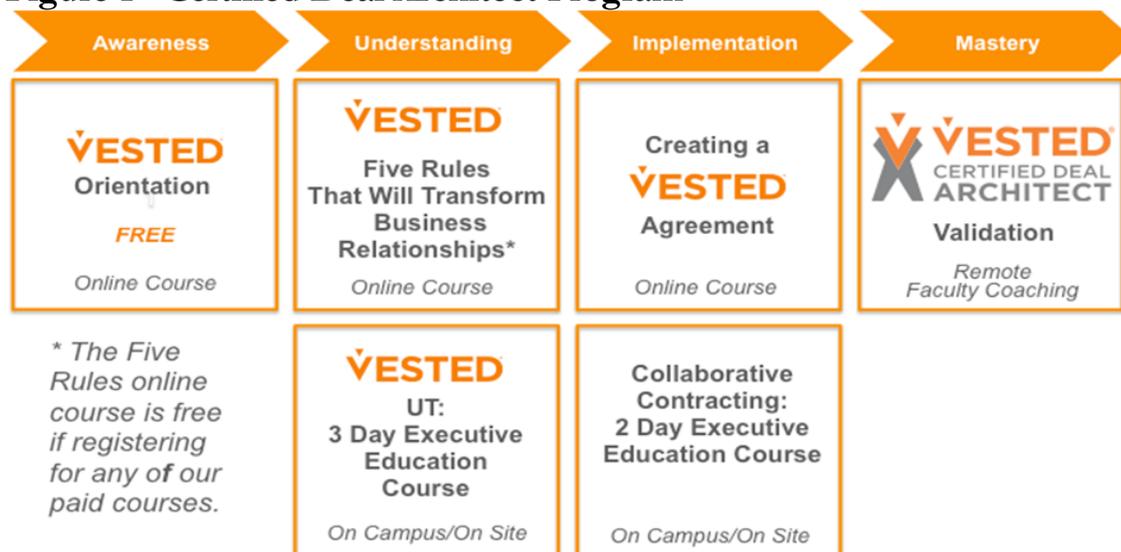
Vested is a business model, movement, and methodology that enables true win-win relationships in which parties are invested in each other’s success. Vested is a progressive approach that takes business relationships to the next level, sparking innovation, improving service, and reducing costs—creating a true win-win – by creating a formal relational contract combined with an outcome-based economic model.

A major finding of UT’s research was that key buyer and supplier stakeholders were not aligned during the bidding and contracting process. The result is typically a rigid legal contract where buyers get what they paid for—not what they wanted.

UT researchers—passionate to help organizations put their theories and concepts into practice—sought to create a “learning by doing” educational program modeled after the Six Sigma Black Belt program. The goal? To institutionalize best practices from their research through a “Certified Deal Architect” (CDA) program. Key components of the program include augmenting traditional classroom training with “on the job” training, and to work with organizations to ramp up field-based support to reinforce and further embed the concepts in an applied environment.

To bring the rules from theory to practice, we have created six courses that come together to create our CDA program. The comprehensive program takes practitioners from the basics of learning the key concepts and how to start, all the way through the implementation and eventually mastery.

Figure 1 - Certified Deal Architect Program



As part of the CDA program, organizations are paired with a UT CDA graduate at one of 10 Centers of Excellence around the world and receive eight hours of coaching support as part of the course. Vested Centers of Excellence are kind of like Master Black Belts, in that they spend their time consulting, mentoring, and training Green Belts and future Black Belts – those going through the learning process on their first Vested agreement. In short, local Centers of Excellence fill the gap between what is taught in the courses and what people are “doing” in the field when they are working to complete an outsourcing agreement. Theory is put into practice with *RealPlay* excises done in working meetings where the contract is the CDA candidate’s homework. Realtime and relevant application of theory into practice.

Results

The result? A shift away from the traditional “learn and do later” to one of an integrated “learning by doing” approach. Gone was “role playing” in how to negotiate and in its place was “real playing,” where teams would come together and learn by doing using a common framework and a coach to provide real-time, hands-on feedback.

Today more than 350 companies have sent over 1600 people to study Vested in one or more UT courses offered in its Certified Deal Architect program. To date, 57 companies have employed the Vested methodology in an effort to improve their outsourcing relationships. Indeed, Telia, the Swedish telecom, has five Vested deals.