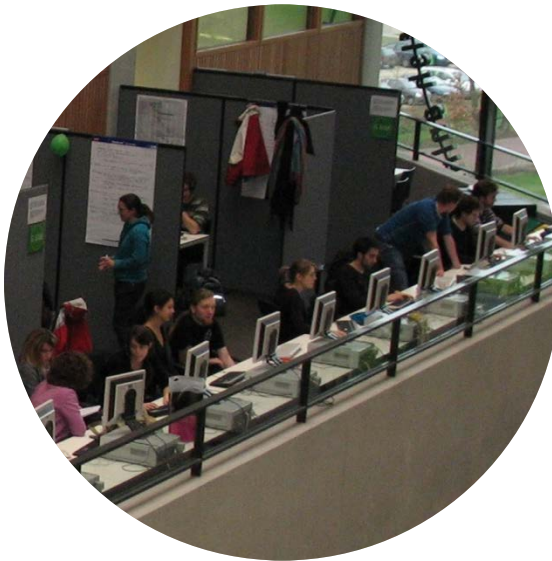


# The **Academic Consultancy Training (ACT)** course at Wageningen University

Tjeerd Jan Stomph  
Wageningen University



# Outline

- ACT? Why-what-how?
- Different perspectives
  - Student - Teacher - Commissioner - Coordinators
- Role in study programs



Ask questions as they arise

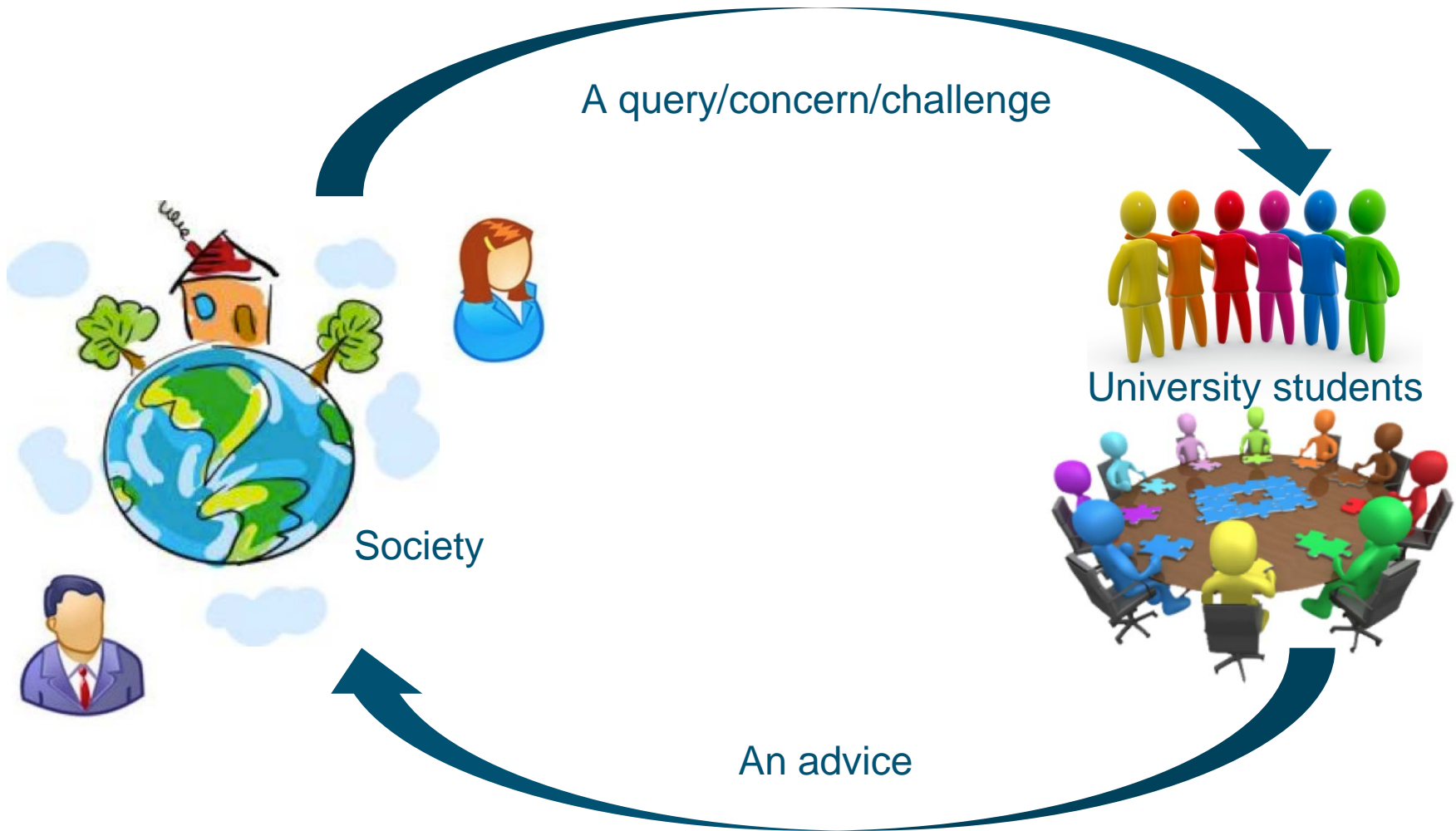


# Why ACT?

- End 1990 employer feedback on WU graduates
  - Well trained in subject matter and scientific skills
  - Presentation and work related skills could be better
  - Working in professional teams needed training
- Over the years focus changed
  - Presentation ➡ high school skill
  - Disciplinary ➡ multi-disciplinary teams
  - Disciplinary ➡ transdisciplinary projects
- The future?
  - Solutions ➡ roadmaps for transformative change?



# ACT? What?



# Society = commissioners

- Business (43%):
  - Small and medium enterprises
  - Multinationals
- Public sector (34%):
  - Local, regional or national
  - Political parties
  - Advisory boards
  - Research and education institutes
- NGO's (16%)
- Public-private cooperation (7%)



Society

# Students = 26 of 32 MSc programs

- Environmental Sciences
  - (soil – water – atmosphere – policy)
- Social Sciences
  - Economy - sociology - communication
- Technology
  - Chemistry -> bio-systems engineering
- Biology
  - Ecology -> molecular
- Animal Sciences
  - marine - terrestrial
- Plant Sciences
  - Molecular breeding -> natural resource management
- Food, Nutrition and Health
  - Molecular nutrition -> life styles



University students



# Approaches to projects differ

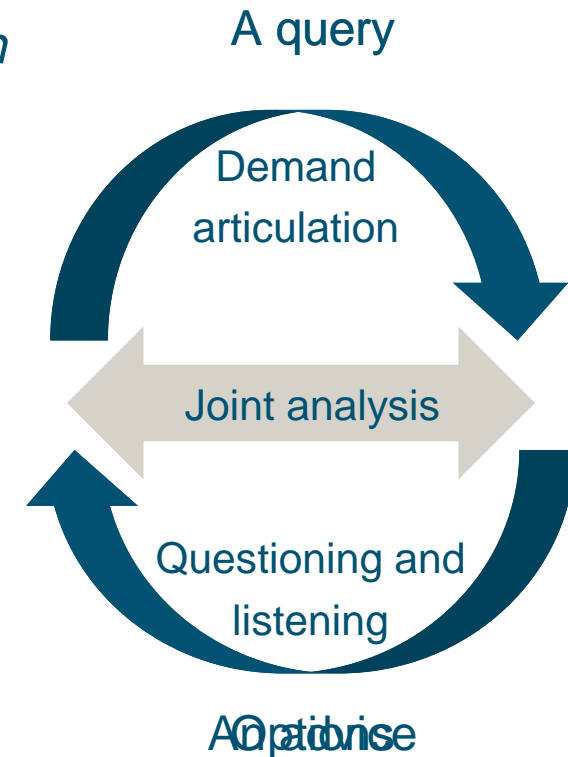
- More multi disciplinary (expert advice)

*Propose a strategy to reduce food waste in a catering company*

*Estimate the impact of climate change on natural fibers production*

- More transdisciplinary (multi-stakeholder platform facilitation)

Develop a digital Eco-map with ecological and sustainability oriented shops and activities in a region



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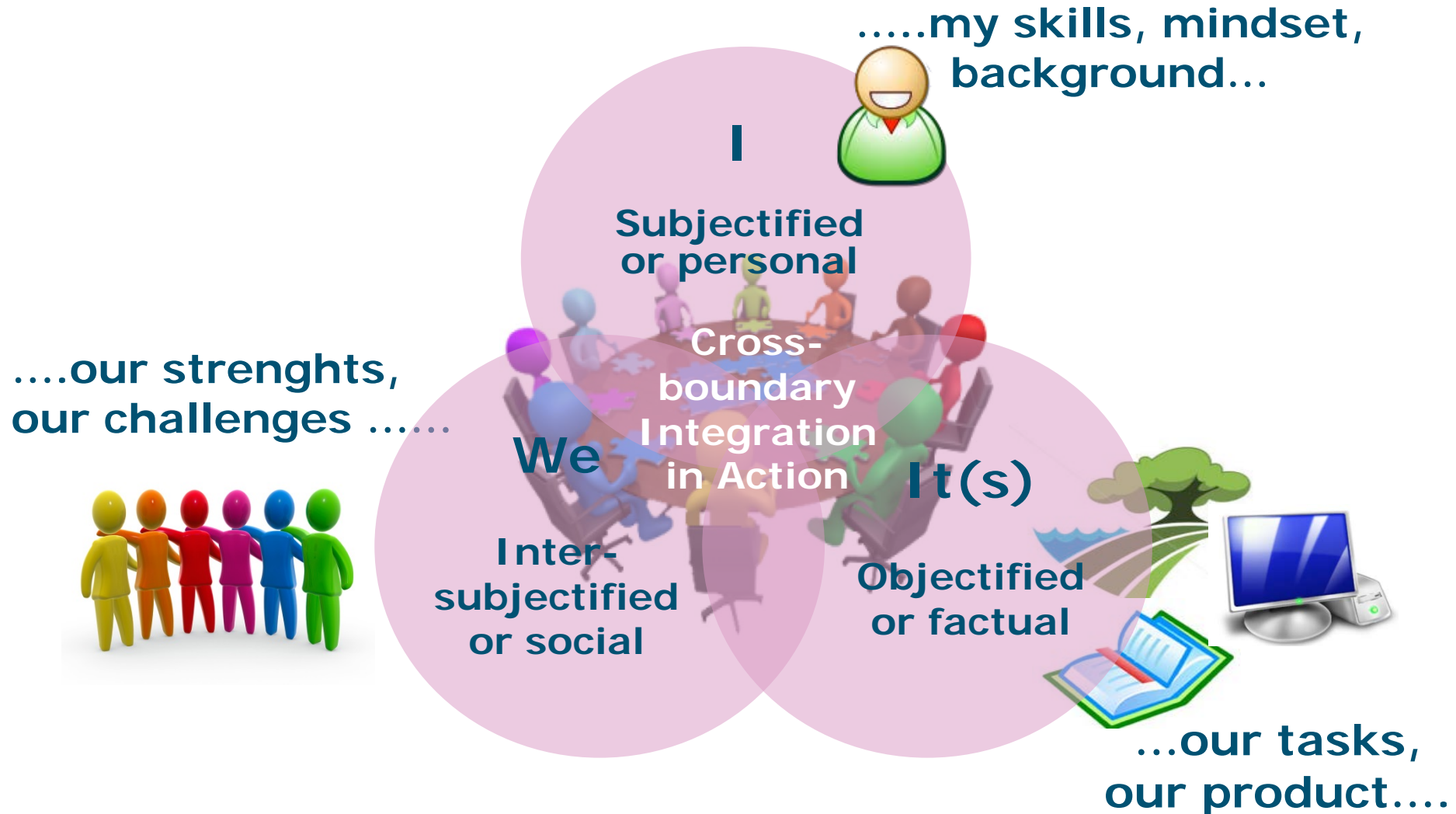
# ACT but how?

- Student – learning
- Teacher – coaching
- Commissioner – expectations
- Coordination – make this all work

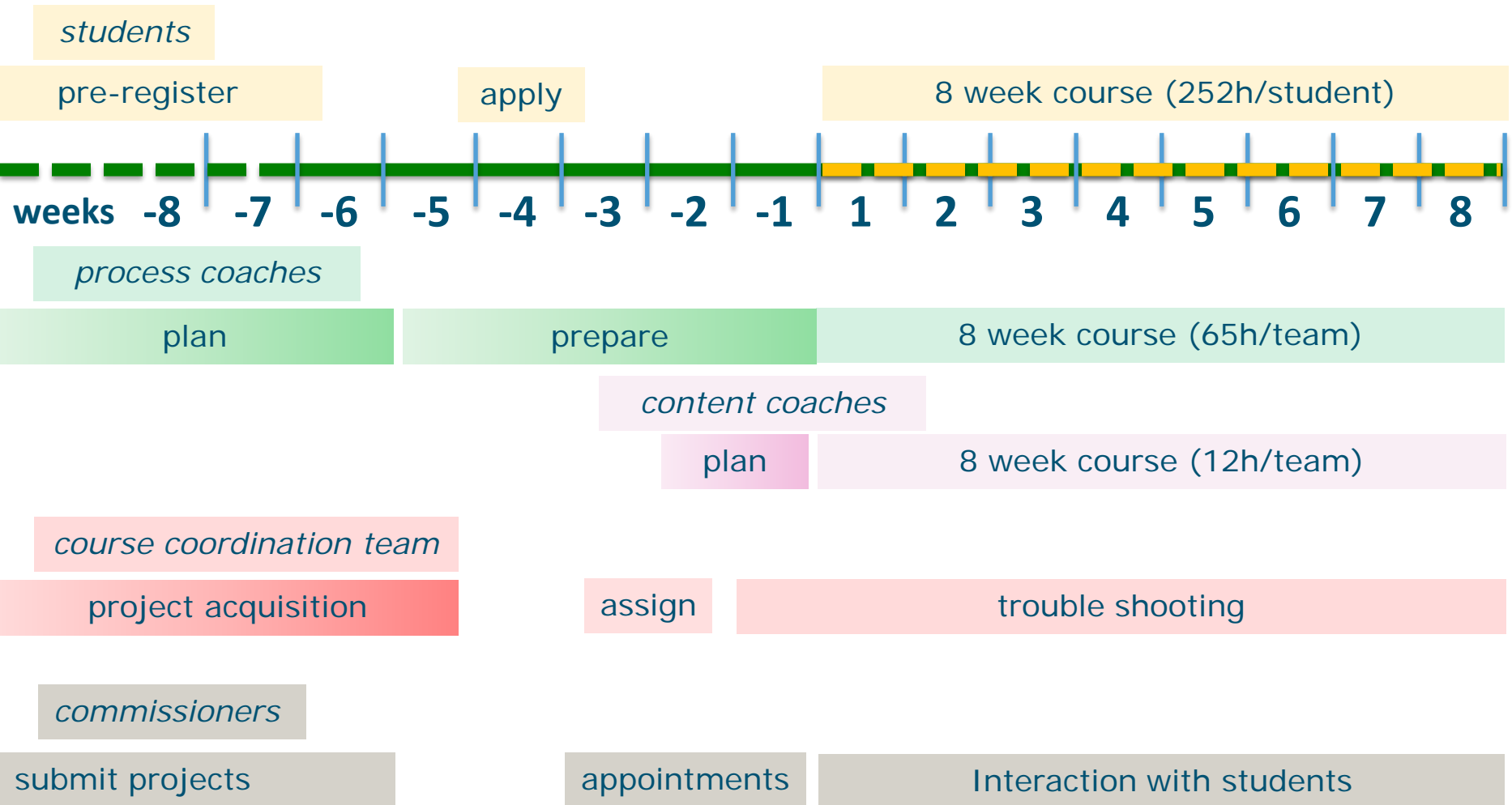




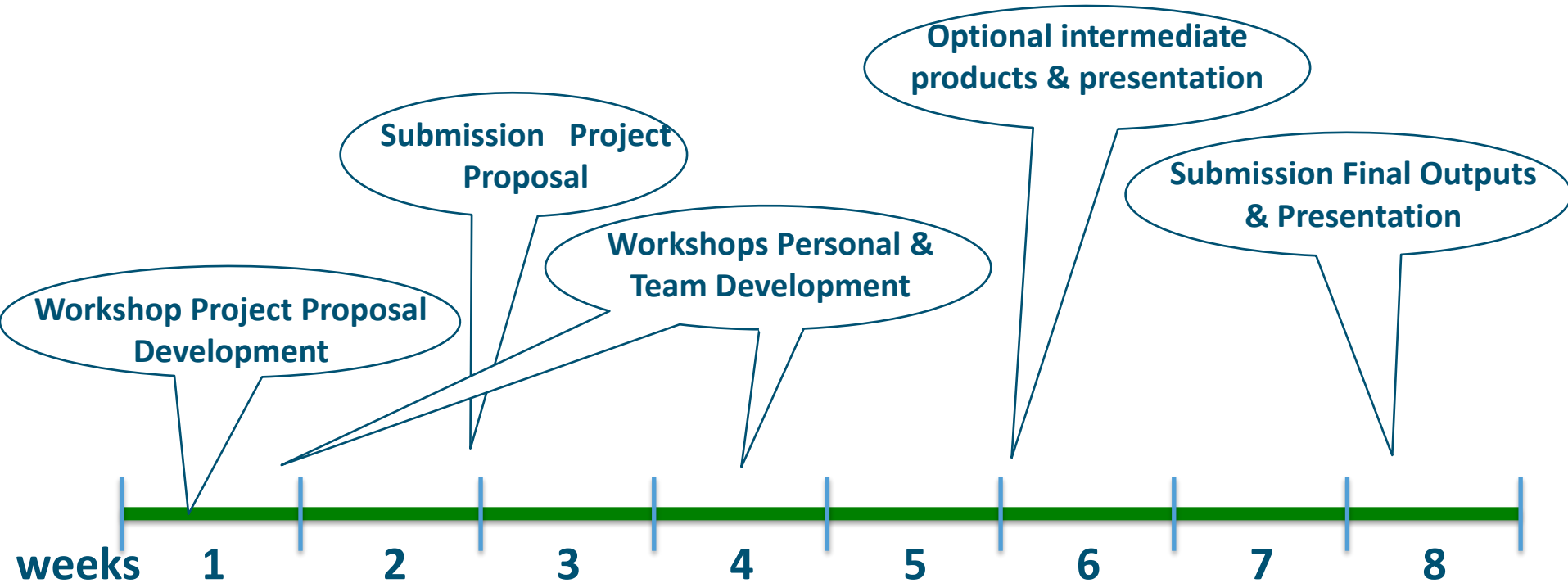
# How? Philosophy – praxis oriented approach



# How? time-line



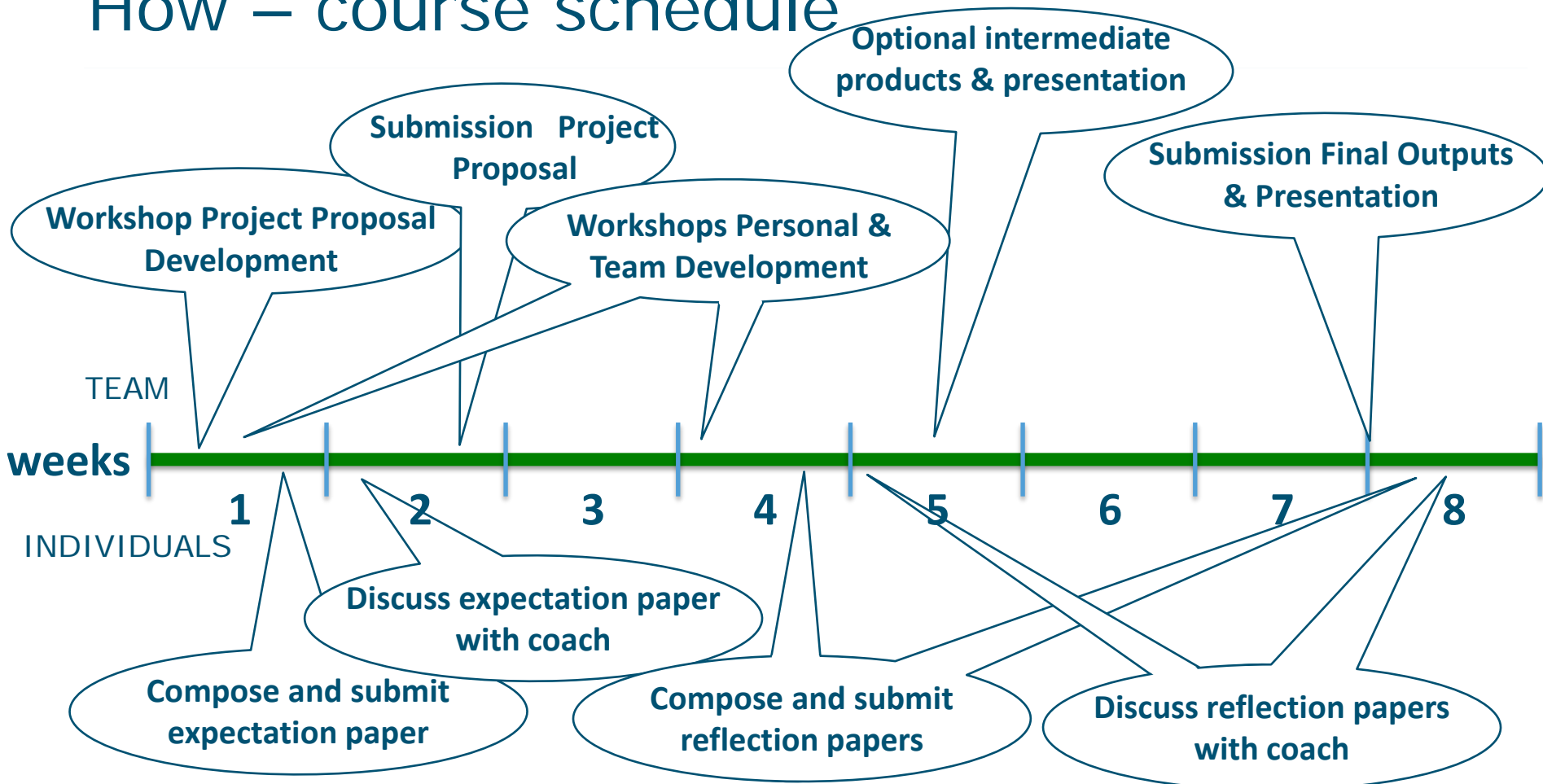
# How – course schedule



- *Support from process coach (personal and team coaching) and from academic advisor (content coaching of team)*
- *Engaging in discussions with various academic and societal actors*



# How – course schedule

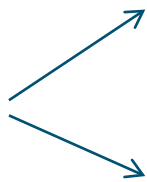


- *Support from process coach (personal and team coaching) and from academic advisor (content coaching of team)*
- *Engaging in discussions with various academic and societal actors*



# How – Educational approach

Merge



## **Instrumental education**

i.e. transferring expert knowledge, expert observations and possible solutions

## **Emancipatory education**

i.e. equipping students to use and experiment with the insights acquired to address together a real life issue and their personal development



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# How Educational approach

- Teams are highly independent
- Roles of project manager, secretary and financial controller are assigned prior to team start
- Teams are composed on the basis of applications
- Project formulation is kept vague and open ended
- Teams negotiate and write their own project proposal before executing it



# Assessment elements

| <u>What</u>                | <u>Responsibility</u> | <u>Assessed by</u>           |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| ■ Expectation paper        | Individual            | Coach                        |
| ■ Project proposal         | Team                  | PW teacher, Coach            |
| ■ Midterm reflection paper | Individual            | Coach, CPD trainer           |
| ■ Final reflection paper   | Individual            | Coach                        |
| ■ Mutual assessment        | Individual/team       | Fellow students              |
| ■ Final product            | Team                  | Advisor, coach, commissioner |



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# Grading

- Project proposal: 15%
  - 50% by coach, 50% by PW teacher
- Product: 42.5%
  - 50% expert, 25% coach, 25% commissioner
- Team process: 10%
  - 100% coach
- Individual process (includes reflection papers): 32.5%
  - 50% coach, 50% mutual assessment team





# Assessment tools

- Rubrics for personal assessment elements
  - Related to the I, We and It domains

| Item      | 0   | 6  | 10   |
|-----------|---|--|--|
| Listening | Not able to listen to contributions of others | Listens well and generally asks clarifying questions when needed | Able to use active listening whenever needed |

- Rubrics for products
  - Slight difference between academic advisors, commissioners and coaches



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# Some numbers 2013/14 & 2014/15

- 950-1000 students
- 150-165 projects
- 75 different process coaches (unique persons)
- 100 content coaches
- 2 academic coordinators
- 4 period coordinators (5 educational periods)
- 1 financial supervisor
- 1 staff responsible for logistics



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# Entrance requirements for students

- Minimally 36 credits of their 120 MSc credits done
- Preferably more credits including a MSc thesis written

## Background:

- All Wageningen MSc's are 2 years of 60 credits each
  - 60 credits courses including ACT
  - 36 credits major thesis / 24 credits minor thesis or academic internship



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# Requirements for process coaches

- Experienced teacher
- Coach training
- Research background in one of the Wageningen field
- Interested in projects beyond own discipline



# Requirements for projects

- Need input from different disciplines
- Feasible within 8 weeks for teams of 5-7 students
- Of an advisory nature
- Would gain from an academic approach
- External party interested to pay the project costs



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# Role of ACT in MSc programs

- Train in multidisciplinary team work
- Train in professional self assessment
- Train in advisory skills

In addition to:

- Disciplinary courses
- Research project
- Academic internship (research environment mostly)





- 
- VT contact to inquire about study abroad for ACT course:
  - Dr. Erik Ervin, Assistant Dean of Academic Programs, CALS;  
eervin@vt.edu





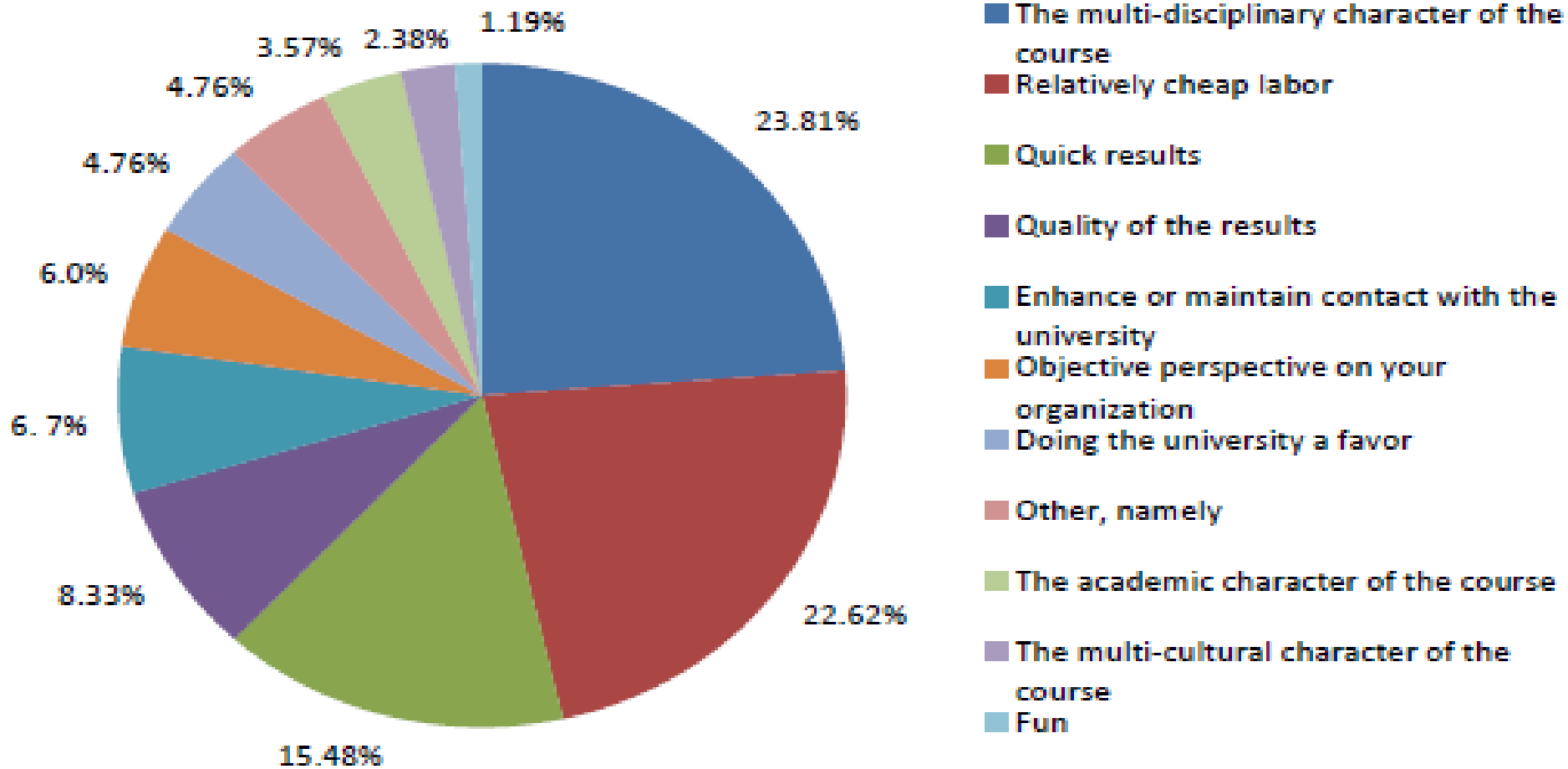
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# Commissioners' comments

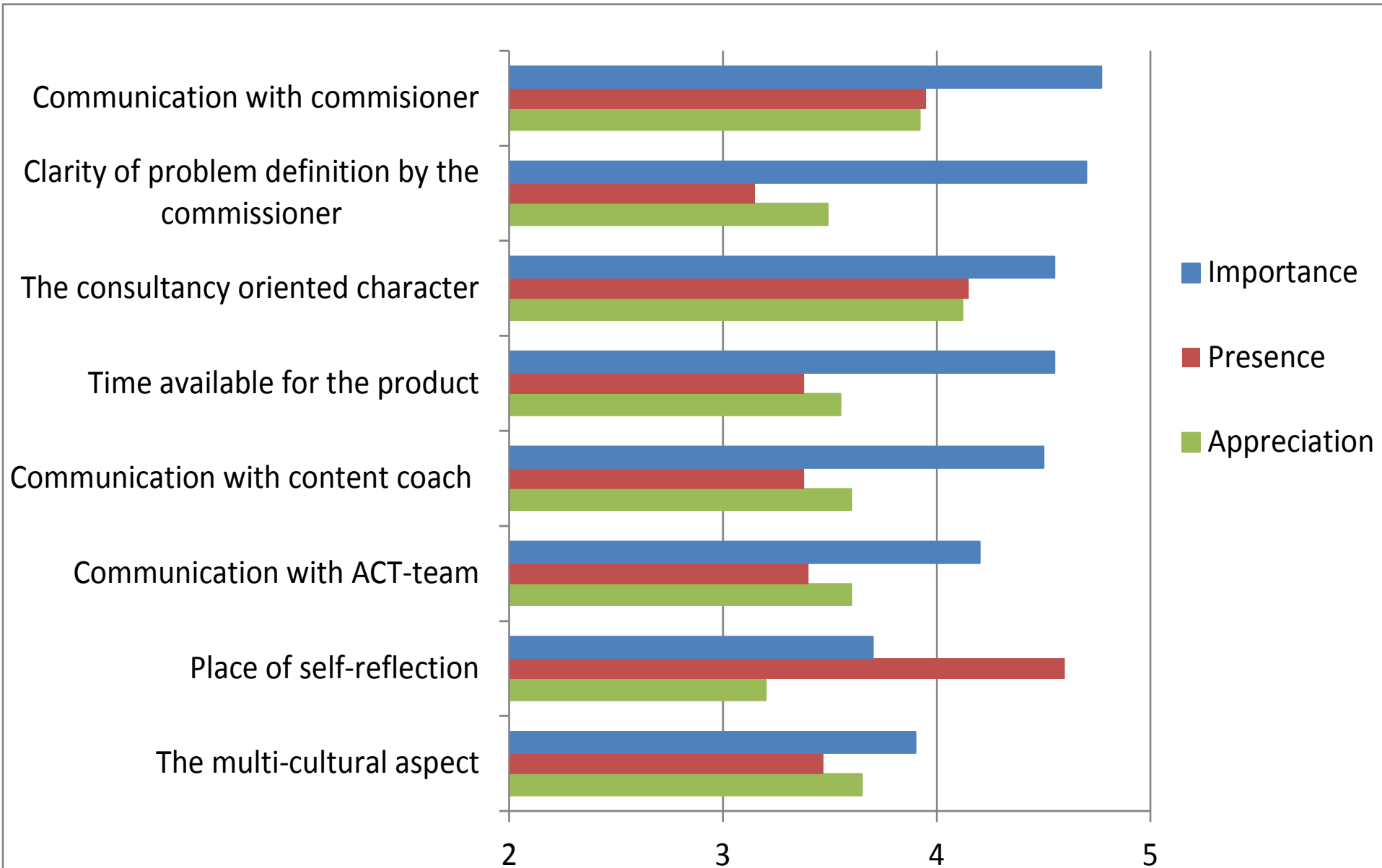
- “Good quality in relation to the price.”
- “I received an exploration that indicated exactly what I needed.”
- “The project gave rise to a continuing discussion and gave ideas for solutions.”
- “They answered my question, so I was satisfied. However, I had expected more from university students...”



# Commissioners' opinion



# Student appreciation (n=264)



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# About working in a team

## Evidence for a Collective Intelligence Factor in the Performance of Human Groups

Anita WilliamsWoolley, Christopher F. Chabris, Alexander Pentland, Nada Hashmi, Thomas W.Malone

**In two studies with 699 individuals working in groups of two to five, there was evidence of a general collective intelligence factor (*the c-factor*) that explained a group's performance on a wide variety of tasks.**



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# About working in a team

This “c factor” was not strongly correlated with the average or maximum individual intelligence of group members .....

..... but was correlated with the average **social sensitivity** of group members, the equality in distribution of **conversational turn-taking**, and the **proportion of females** in the group.

