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EXPRESSING MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES IN DESIGNED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Interventions in higher education have sought to improve student attainment levels in core competencies at the undergraduate level. Curriculum redesign has been advanced as one such critical strategic approach for addressing persistent disparities in rates of progression between students, however subjects such as management education continue to exemplify misalignment between learning outcomes and stakeholder expectations. To gain a deeper understanding of the potentially conflicting perspectives and expectations of stakeholders in curriculum design, the study selected one core undergraduate management module for more in-depth research. The implications of this research are discussed, including a re-examination of current approaches to the design of learning outcomes for management education.

There is evidence to suggest that students compartmentalise domains of knowledge and find it difficult to establish content links, both horizontally in the same year of study, and vertically, linking subject areas at different levels of an undergraduate course (Mintzberg, 2004). Thus, for some first-year undergraduate students, the transition process to higher education represents a significant and often insurmountable challenge (Biggs and Tang, 2011; Kift et al, 2010; Byrne and Flood, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Several reasons have been advanced for this compartmentalisation, including perceived tensions between the demands and expectations of the higher education sector and the underpinning epistemological views reinforced by secondary schooling (Coertjens et al, 2017; Fee and Holland-Minkley, 2010; Lowe and Cook, 2003; Cook and Leckey, 1999; Biggs, 1996). Students therefore often enter the first year of degree level studies with legacy expectations of boundaries around subject areas and an expectation that these lines of demarcation will be maintained in the course curriculum that frames their learning experiences at University. However legacy learning expectations, coupled with a perceived silo approach in the undergraduate curricula, are possibly detrimental to a wider and deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of disciplines as experienced in organisations. This suggests that by embracing this compartmentalisation within the undergraduate curriculum, students may carry this fragmented approach into their later professional practice (Ottewill et al, 2005).

Serious tensions may therefore occur between curricular structure that serves to enact and enforce these artificial boundaries, a narrative that espouses disciplinary fluidity, and a worldview that recognises the increasingly interconnected nature of global business and management activity. These tensions are acutely evident in disciplines such as business and management education that exemplify a divided focus between developing scholarly competencies and providing experiential learning elements for students including the development of non-technical or 'soft' skills such as critical thinking and communication. These perceived deficiencies in learning experiences have in part been attributed to "…outdated curricula, inappropriate pedagogical techniques and/or inadequate opportunities for work-integrated learning." (Jackson and Chapman, 2012).

> "*It is in the observations of the enacted curriculum that we often witness tensions between what is intended, what is aspired to and what is achieved*" (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010, p. 57).

Costigan and Brink (2015) further assert that "…misaligned learning goals may be the root cause behind misaligned curricula, suggesting that business programs may need to do more than revise their required courses to become increasingly relevant" (p. 265). Indeed, the issue of *relevancy* of programme content in management education has been intensely and extensively debated (Rubin and Dierdorff, 2009; Clinebell and Clinebell, 2008; Trank and Rynes, 2003; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Arnold et al, 1999; Mutch, 1997; Badawy, 1976). However, past research on this issue has been informative primarily at the *graduate* level of studies with decided under-emphasis on learning processes at the *undergraduate* level. Indeed, research at this level in management education places greater emphasis on processes for improving levels of student engagement and retention (Black et al, 2014; Nixon and Williams, 2014; Barnett and Coate, 2005).

Recognising these possible gaps in learning experiences and faced with increased pressure from external accreditation agencies to establish an appropriate balance between knowledge and skills acquisition, business schools often expend considerable effort in developing initiatives aimed at improving student employability skills through academic studies, work experience, skills development training, and extra-curricular activities. However, subjects such as management education continue to exemplify misalignment between the curricula and stakeholder expectations of learning outcomes (Plewa et al, 2015; Costigan and Brink, 2015; Howard and Warwick, 2013) and there remains a gap in how these (often diverse) perspectives may be considered during curriculum design.

These initial insights raise three questions that we seek to explore in this research. Firstly, we seek to understand: *What are the perspectives of multiple stakeholders on curriculum design processes?* By understanding the role of stakeholders, and their expectations for curriculum design in management education, we can further explore possible approaches to the integration of these perspectives in design processes. In doing so we discuss how the research results may further the debate on approaches to curriculum design processes in management education, specifically: *What are the implications of this research on curriculum design processes for undergraduate management education?*

We limit this research to an examination of learning experiences during the crucial first year of transition for *undergraduate* students, experiences that may contribute to students' initial perceptions of - and perhaps mould adopted approaches to – their higher education studies. Bovill et al (2011B) suggests that the curriculum acts "as a key driver for improving student engagement, and thereby success from first year onwards" (p. 198). We suggest that exploration of these interrelationships and interdependencies will lead to a more thorough and enriched appreciation of issues of misalignment, and thus contribute to pedagogical research debates in business and management education.

Stakeholder theory emerged as a useful framework for contextual exploration of these inter-relationships between

the network objects or actors – stakeholders, teaching materials, learning outcomes, or any other resource used in curriculum design. In a commercial context, Jones and Wicks (1999) summarises the main premises of stakeholder theory to include: (a) concern with the nature of the relationships between stakeholders, that is entities that affect and are affected by the organisation's decisions (Freeman, 2010); and (b) that the interests of all legitimate stakeholders are of intrinsic value, with no one set of interests being dominant (Clarkson, 1995; Donaldson and Preston, 1995). Despite the multiplicity of approaches in identifying stakeholders, we adapt Freeman's (2010) definition to describe stakeholders in higher education as those groups or individuals that affect (or are affected by) realisation of learning goals or outcomes. Moreover, there is some consensus that key stakeholders in higher education should necessarily include students, faculty, and the external business community (Plewa et al, 2015; Mainardes et al, 2012; Bovill et al, 2011A; Chapleo and Simms, 2010; Jongbloed et al, 2008). Extensive past research on these stakeholder relationships in curriculum design include studies by Alexander and Hjortsø (2018) on participatory curriculum development in higher education; Jongbloed et al (2008) on the interdependencies between higher education institutions and stakeholders; and Bovill et al's (2011B) research on students as key stakeholders in curriculum design processes. Yet few studies explore stakeholder relationships in curriculum design within undergraduate management education, particularly during the transitory first-year.

Additionally, in examining curriculum design processes at this level, attention is drawn to the principle of *constructive alignment* between artefacts, such as syllabi, assessment methods, and other resources (Biggs and Tang, 2011; Colby et al, 2011) as a method for aligning teaching strategies and assessment methods with learning outcomes. However in the design of learning outcomes, constructive alignment brings focus to *how* and *what* students are to learn (Biggs and Tang, 2011), though understanding the relevance (*why)* of the intended learning outcome may differ depending on the perspective of the stakeholder.

In seeking to understand the issue of misalignment in curriculum design, we explore those entities that underlie the design processes. For our research, we adapt Beauchamp's (1972) definition of curriculum as that encompassing the learning goals and the content selected to achieve these goals, and curriculum design as the form and arrangement of (these) goals and content in accordance with the administrative requirements of the institution. We thus distinguish curriculum (content and learning outcomes) from (a) modes of instruction or pedagogy – established mechanisms for content delivery such as lectures, group projects, tutorials, and work placements; and (b) assessment methods - viewed as central to the undergraduate experience (Brown and Knight, 1994). Our goal in adopting this narrow view of curriculum is not to ignore the pivotal roles of pedagogy and assessment, but to approach each as separate fields of inquiry within our research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our qualitative research selects a core first year undergraduate management module, named *Business Information Systems and Quantitative Methods*, for further analyses. Students studying the module are enrolled on either the B.A. Marketing course (offered by the business school) or LLB Law with Business (offered by the law school). As a traditional marketing module - characterised by exam-based assessments and lecture-based curriculum delivery (Black et al, 2014) - it provides a good framework to explore interrelationships between stakeholders in curriculum design. The module provides first-year students with an introduction to information systems and the application of statistical techniques for data analyses to support business decision-making.

However, a preliminary analysis of the module revealed several hidden problems in terms of structural legacy, delivery pragmatics and perceived interdisciplinary incommensurability. The module therefore provided a rich but well bounded case and, by virtue of some qualitative research with key stakeholders, afforded the opportunity to examine what lies beneath the visible problems. The module learning goals and content (curriculum) and the curriculum design processes were analysed to determine the objects and relationships that exist, with a focus on the three defined groups of stakeholders – students, faculty, and the external business community.

From the perspective of teaching faculty, we interpret the contextual data based on our experiences as educators and practitioners in the field of business and management. We therefore examine the artefacts and resources used by teaching faculty in curriculum design. Specifically from this perspective, our conducted research sought to understand:

> *What are the learning expectations of the teaching team for the module?*

To develop an understanding of the student perspective, data was collected from past students of the management module. An email requesting participation and providing a web link to the electronic survey was sent to students who completed the module between one to two years prior. Participants were ensured of full confidentiality and anonymization of the data. Out of the approximately 150 students who received the request, 60 students responded (representing a 40% response rate). Approximately seventy two percent (72%) of respondents gained A-levels; 8% gained BTEC qualifications and the remaining 20% of students gained either mixed BTEC and A-level qualifications, or had completed other qualifying training. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of students indicated that they worked part-time during their first year of studies; additionally 75% of students indicated that they attended a state school (versus independent school) prior to attending university. Through exploration of the main themes of pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment the survey was designed to elicit key student issues around the selected undergraduate management education module, specifically:

> *What learning expectations do students bring to their University course in general and this first year module in particular?*

A five-point Likert scale (*1="Definitely disagree" to 5="Definitely agree"*) was used to assess students' perception on the following items:

1. Curriculum: In your experience did you find that:
   (a) *The module content was intellectually stimulating;*
   (b) *The seminars in the module were a good way of exploring the module content;*
   (c) *I understood the relevance of the module to my course;*
   (d) *The learning outcomes for the module were made clear to me;*

2. Assessment: *In your experience did you find that –*
   (a) *Preparing for the assessment helped my understanding of the module content;*
   (b) *I felt that the final assessment method (100% written exam) was suitable;*
   (c) *The feedback on my written work was useful;*

3. Pedagogy: *In your experience did you find that –*
   (a) *the teaching on the module was of a high standard;*
   (b) *Sufficient guidance was available from the teaching staff when needed;*
   (c) *Learning resources (e.g. e-readings, module links) were of a high standard.*

Students were also asked the following open-ended survey items:
   (a) *Overall I was satisfied with the module* (using 5-point scale)
   (b) *What did you most like about the module?*
   (c) *What did you least like about the module?*

We undertook both a quantitative and qualitative approach to analyse the student responses in the three areas of pedagogy, assessment and curriculum. Subsequent to the survey, a small group of fifteen (15) students were invited to attend a focus group to elicit more in-depth discussion on perceptions of curriculum design. The focus group was facilitated by past students of the module.

To gain an understanding of expectations from the perspective of the external business community, we examined the requirements from relevant accreditation agencies of the university, namely:

1. Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB);
2. European Quality Link (EQUAL), its member organisation European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) and associated accreditation - European Foundation for Management Development Quality Improvement System (EQUIS);

Through examining the quality assurance guidelines of the above-mentioned agencies we sought to understand:
   What are the learning expectations of the external business community for students of management education and this module specifically?

Thus in addressing our primary research question - *What are the perspectives of multiple stakeholders on curriculum design processes?* - this ethnological-based study seeks to gain the viewpoints of students, teaching faculty, and the business community in key areas of curriculum design. The specific research sub-questions were thus identified as:

- *What are the expectations of the teaching team on the module?*
- *What learning expectations do students bring to their University course in general and this first year module in particular?*
- *What are the learning expectations of the external business community for students of management education and this module specifically?*

BACKGROUND – MANAGEMENT EDUCATION MODULE

The *Business Information Systems and Quantitative Methods (BISQM)* module extends over the full academic year and on average 120 students enrol on the module each year, with approximately two thirds of enrolled students pursuing the B.A. in Marketing degree on either the 3-year full-time or 4-year sandwich program in the Business School. The remaining one third of students are enrolled on the LL.B. Law with Business programme offered by the Law school. Entry requirements for the B.A. Marketing programme include GCSEs in English and Maths grade C/4; and for the LL.B Law with Business, entry requirements include GCSEs in Maths *or* Science and English grade C4.

In 2016/17 approximately 10% of students on the module qualified at A-level only; 30% of students gained BTEC qualifications only; and the remaining students entered with combined A-Level and BTEC, or other, qualifications. 2016/17 statistics compiled by the university showed that at the course level:

- Student engagement (based on attendance) is low
- Progression rates for Marketing students is less than 80% (from year 1 to year 2 across all level 4 modules)
- Disparities between students of different educational backgrounds – students classified as having an 'A-levels only' background achieved an 85% pass rate compared to 'BTEC only' students who achieved a 25% pass rate on the course.

Specific to the module, the failure/non-completion rates for students were relatively high compared to other core modules; in 2015/16, the failure/non-completion rate was 20.7% for students enrolled in the Marketing course, though this figure does not take into account withdrawal rates due to personal or financial reasons, or course transfer. In 2016/17 the failure rate was 19.5% with 42% of students achieving a module grade of 2:1 or above. The module therefore exemplifies some of the disparities in student engagement and achievement that the Business School are keen to improve. We further explored the three themes of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to understand stakeholder participation in curriculum design processes.
Curriculum

Table 1 illustrates the learning outcomes designed for this module. For the purpose of this study, we divide the outcomes according to the two primary topics that comprise the module - namely (a) Business Information Systems and (b) Quantitative Methods – and further classify the outcomes according to content areas (skills or knowledge).

(i) Information systems theory (learning outcomes a,b,c);

(ii) Introduction to statistical techniques (learning outcomes d and f); and

(iii) Use of technologies for collecting data and conducting simple data analyses (learning outcomes e and g).

The BISQM module is the only one at the first-year undergraduate level that focuses on the two topic areas of Business Information Systems and Quantitative methods. Though few overlaps occur in LOs across first-year undergraduate models as a result of internal standardisation processes, this does not apply in the development of content. Thus, unless the individual teaching faculty consult with colleagues responsible for other first-year modules, some overlap in the content is introduced – such as specific business theories or software resources.

Learning outcomes (LOs) are available to students at the beginning of the academic year via the module handbook, which is printed and distributed to students during the first lecture. The LOs are developed primarily by teaching faculty and additionally undergo approval processes at the departmental or university level. The design of outcomes are influenced by broad guidelines from external accreditation agencies including EFMD and AACSB. The accreditation agencies network with an amalgamation of business schools, corporations and other organisations that focus on quality improvement in business and management education by benchmarking against international standards.

At the university-level, teaching faculty are faced with increased pressure to consider initiatives aimed at improving student engagement, retention and progression which means in practice a re-evaluation of the use of materials and assessments that rely on a common educational background. Additionally university-wide employability initiative articulates four transferable business skills that students should develop during the B.A. Marketing course. Though there is no single definitive description of what employability skills should be, or how such skills can be effectively measured or transferred (Cranmer, 2006), these *soft skills* are described as:

- ability to express clearly, both verbally and in writing
- advanced planning and strategic thinking
- research, analysis and presentation skills
- the ability to take the initiative and think creatively

Business Information Systems	Quantitative Methods
a. Describe major classes of information systems, their source data, and functions (*knowledge*)	d. Interpret representations and summaries of univariate and bi-variate data relating to business & marketing. (*knowledge*)
b. Develop a basic understanding of issues affecting the use of information systems within organisations. (*knowledge*)	e. Analyse output from both specialist statistical and general office software. (*knowledge*)
c. Apply basic information systems concepts in an organisational context. (*skill*)	f. Gather business data from published sources. (*skill*)
	g. Conduct and interpret basic quantitative analysis using software (*skill*)

Table 1: Module learning outcomes

Pedagogy

Teaching on the module is structured as weekly one-hour lectures, and weekly one-hour seminars (with up to 20 students per seminar group). The approach to content delivery follows two strands according to the content:

(a) *Business Information Systems (BIS)* is taught in the first half of the academic year. The primary lecturer for the topic is from the department of Management (information systems). Theoretical concepts in information systems are introduced in weekly lectures that are held within a traditional classroom environment. These concepts are reinforced in weekly hourly seminars by incorporating experiential learning elements through application of a case study approach. Three other teaching faculty (also from the Information Systems division) facilitate these weekly seminars. A guest lecturer from the external local business community is invited to present one lecture on the use of business information systems within the work environment.

(b) *Quantitative Methods (QM)* is taught in the second half of the academic year. The primary lecturer for this topic is from the department of Economics. The module team for this topic is comprised solely of the lecturer together with one other individual from the Information Systems division (who also has a background in quantitative methods). Weekly lectures introduce key statistical techniques for analysing data, and weekly 1-hour seminars, primarily conducted in computer laboratories, focus on practical application of these statistical concepts using industry-standard software (primarily IBM SPSS Statistics) for data analysis.

Teaching faculty are responsible for the selection of resources (including software) used in the module. The decision on the tools used are influenced by a number of factors including: (a) availability of the software to students (maintained by the central information systems services department); (b) level of

Topic	Assessment structure
BIS	Formative Assessment 1: Mock exam question; (time frame – November, semester 1)
QM	Formative Assessment 2: SPSS Assignment (time frame – March, semester 2)
BIS and QM	Summative – 100% of module mark 3 hour, open book exam. BIS – answer 2 questions out of 8 QM – 5 mandatory questions (time frame – May, semester 3)

Table 2: Summary of assessment structures

familiarity of the teaching faculty with the software; and (c) software used by other modules within the same programme.

The module uses two core textbooks: one text introduces information systems, and the second is a text on quantitative methods for business. A second workbook is also used for quantitative methods – this workbook developed by the QM lecturer is a compilation of tasks that students are required to complete during seminars over the academic term.

Assessment

The single summative assessment at the end of the academic year consists of a three-hour examination accounting for 100% of the final grade. The timing of the exam is typically three to six weeks after the last lecture/seminar for the module. Mirroring the divided approach to content delivery, the exam comprises two sections: (a) Business Information Systems and (b) Quantitative Methods. The exam is equally weighted between the two sections – each topic contributes 50% to the final grade. For the BIS section of the exam, students are required to answer two out of eight essay questions on information systems, where each question is work 25 marks. The four general criteria used when assessing the essays are: (i) content; (ii) evidence; (iii) argument; and (iv) expression. The QM section of the exam comprises five multi-part questions that are mandatory, and cumulatively worth 50 marks. The exam is open-book as students are allowed to bring in reference material including case studies, and lecture and seminar notes.

Formative assessment in Information Systems occurs near the end of the first term and comprises optional submission of one essay, similar in format and structure to a final exam question. For Quantitative Methods, formative assessment occurs near the end of the second term, and require students to perform general data analyses (using the standard industry software) on a small dataset of companies. The resulting essay is submitted electronically (via email or the module's online drop-box). The structure of assessments is summarised in Table 2.

Curriculum Design Processes

University-wide initiatives place curriculum design mechanisms as one of the primary strategic goals of the university. In 2016, the university launched a curriculum redesign project with the overarching goal of aligning university courses to a standard curriculum framework, with specific key objectives including:

- Engagement of alumni, employers and professional bodies in the formulation and facilitation of all courses;
- Development of relevant professional attributes gained through work placement or experiences embedded in course design and assessment methods; and
- Personalisation of learning experiences to address disparities in attainment levels

The business school facilitates student feedback on aspects of the course (including the curriculum) via the academic course committee meetings. The course committee is comprised of teaching faculty and student representatives for each of the three years of the course. Each student representative is scheduled to submit feedback on each of his or her modules during the two-hour meeting. Thus, the first-year student representative for the course may provide feedback on the six modules that run during that academic year.

Student feedback is also facilitated through the anonymised student survey (using EvaSys), which is distributed during the second half of the academic year. The survey is designed to capture student perspectives on their learning environment and module content, and includes two questions that are specific to the curriculum namely: (i) *I understand the learning outcomes of the module;* and (ii) *I understand how this module links in with the rest of my course*. One other survey mechanism used is the National Student Survey (NSS). The generic survey questions address some aspects of the course including: (a) teaching; (b) assessment and feedback; (c) learning opportunities; (d) learning resources and (e) academic support. As a national survey, the feedback generated is not specific to a particular module.

Another opportunity for facilitating feedback from students is during the student *placement year (*typically in a work placement or internship)*, which in many cases represents the first point of student contact with an employer. During the placement period (minimum of forty-eight weeks during the third year of studies) students maintain an electronic portfolio of the skills and attributes developed during the placement. Students may identify any gaps in their knowledge that they think may be effectively addressed within the curriculum prior to the work placement. However, no formal processes exist for communicating identified gaps in students' skills or knowledge directly to module leaders.

As an existing module, any modifications to the module learning goals require an extended internal consultation and review processes at the level of the business department or university. Entities involved in the approval process include: (a) course committee – comprised primarily of teaching faculty; (b) school academic quality and standards committee; (c) external examiner; and, if re-design will result in changes to learning outcomes at the programme level, (d) external subject specialist expert. The committees meet periodically throughout the academic year.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

We further explore the roles of respective stakeholders – namely (a) students, (b) teaching faculty, and (c) external business community – in curriculum design processes for the BISQM module. By adopting this paradigm of interpretive systems research we seek a more in-depth perspective for understanding and analysing the possible contradictions that may occur in the learning expectations of these stakeholders.

Curriculum

Teaching faculty for the module are responsible for development of the module handbook, a fifteen page document which describes the module resources (including teaching faculty and textbooks to be used), the learning outcomes of the module, and a timetable of teaching activities. The handbook is printed at the start of the academic year, and is distributed to students during a lecture or seminar in the first teaching week. Learning goals for the module are articulated in the module handbook – a printed version is distributed to students during the first lecture, and in seminars during the first academic week. An electronic version of the handbook is also available for download from the module learning room. The handbook describes the module content to be delivered and includes a weekly timetable of activities for the full academic year.

As part of the survey, students were asked: *What did you like (or dislike) most about the module?*. Table 3 summarises the survey results from students with respect to the questions on the curriculum. Student responses were varied - some of these responses are illustrated below. Also indicated are the relevant educational background of the student respondent (A-level, BTEC, or both), and the course on which the student is enrolled (LL.B Law with Business or B.A Marketing).

"While there was a clear divide between the BIS part and the QM part, both work well together and what I learnt has been very relevant in my later studies in both marketing and other business topics."
[A-level; Marketing]

"Was slightly unsure how both sides of the modules were related with each other." [Mixed – BTEC, A-level; Law]

"Did not understand the module and its relevance to future study and in real business practice"
[A-level; Marketing]

"[The module] is not overly interesting and does not relate to the course I am studying." [A-level; Marketing]

"I find it confusing sometimes as to how some topics are relevant to my course" [A-level; Marketing]

"Quants section of the unit is more interesting as the lectures are more understandable and they involve us more. The maths aspect is more enjoyable"
[BTEC; Marketing]

"I liked the variety of case studies for BIS" [A-level; Law]
"[I disliked] the case studies about information systems"
[Mixed – BTEC, A-level; Marketing]

Survey Question	Results
The module content was intellectually stimulating;	26% definitely or mostly agree
I understood the relevance of the module to my course	28% definitely or mostly agree
The learning outcomes for the module were made clear to me	20% definitely or mostly agree
The seminars in the module were a good way of exploring the module content	16% definitely or mostly agree

Table 3: Student survey responses – Curriculum (content & learning goals)

"The content felt irrelevant to my chosen career"
[A-level; Law]

"I enjoyed how challenging it was, the two different sides of the module made it interesting."
[Mixed – BTEC, A-level; Law]

Teaching faculty may initiate changes to the module curriculum during the academic year prior to the year in which the changes are to be implemented. Any suggested changes undergo academic approval processes which may differ depending on the level of modification required. For the purpose of this research we examine the approval processes for what is considered a minor modification to the module, and therefore not as extensive as processes required for significant module or course changes. A minor modification is one that:

- May include changes to module title, module level, credit value, module aims, module outcomes, and assessment methods
- Does not result in changes to course learning outcomes (or impact on other modules)
- Does not result in changes to overall assessment strategies.

Minor modifications, including changes to the module learning outcomes, are first reviewed and approved by a course committee (comprised of academic peers). The process requires submission of course change form, and amended module specifications. The module specifications document includes in part:

(a) *general overview and aims of the module*;
(b) *module content – restricted to identification of the major themes and issues to be covered in the module*;
(c) *module learning outcomes (addressing skills and knowledge)*;
(d) *range of direct contact teaching and learning methods by which outcomes are to be achieved* and
(e) *methods of assessment (indicating the type and weighting of the assessment elements)*

The approved documents are subsequently submitted to the school quality committee, which meets periodically during the academic year. The iterative approval processes may extend over a few months, where any modifications to the original application are rectified and resubmitted to the quality committee. Major modifications (or implementation of new programmes) require further approval by a separate university wide committee comprised of academic and

professional services staff, and external individuals with subject-level expertise.

Academic course committees (comprised of both students and staff) are facilitated twice in the academic year – the first occurs approximately midway during the first half of the academic year; the second meeting occurs during the second half of the academic year. The leader for the respective course facilitates the two-hour meetings and invited attendees include teaching faculty for all course modules and a student representative for each year of study. Student representatives garner any concerns or issues from fellow students, and communicate any feedback to teaching faculty on respective modules.

EvaSys (Evaluation and System software) for higher education institutions is also used to capture student feedback on any issues regarding the module. The survey includes broad questions on: (a) Pedagogical approaches; (b) Assessment and feedback; (c) Module organisation and resources; and (d) Application of theory to practice. The survey uses a five point Likert-type scale with responses ranging from 'definitely disagree' to 'definitely agree'. Specific to the curriculum (content and learning outcomes), two questions are covered in the student survey:

(i) *I understand the learning outcomes of the module;* and

(ii) *I understand how this module links in with the rest of my course*.

At the end of the survey period, students have access to an overview of the results (excluding student comments) via the module learning page.

External accreditation agencies such as EQUAL and AACSB set broad guidelines concerning design processes for learning goals albeit at the level of the course or programme, where detailed learning goals by module are viewed as the responsibility of teaching faculty. The AACSB defines curriculum as the adopted content, pedagogies and structures used to achieve the defined learning goals, and articulates that curriculum content (distinguished from learning goals) should address several skill areas including in part:

- *Evidence-based decision making that integrates current and emerging technologies;*
- *Understanding of the role of technology in society, including behavioral implications of technology in the workplace*

(AACSB, 2018, p. 35)

EQUIS (2018) also suggests that graduates should demonstrate a range of skills specific to business and management and also relevant personal and interpersonal skills to include:

- *Cognitive skills of critical thinking, analysis and synthesis.*
- *Effective problem solving and decision making*
- *Effective use of communication and information technology for business applications*
- *Ability to conduct research into business and management issues.*
- *Project management skills.*
- *Effective performance within a team environment*

In designing the learning goals, the AACSB suggests that:

Learning goals and curricula reflect expectations of stakeholders. Schools incorporate perspectives from stakeholders, including organizations employing graduates, alumni, students, the university community, policy makers, etc., into curricula management processes. (AACSB, 2018, p. 33)

The AACSB also defines broad learning goals for Bachelor's degree programs, such as the B.A. Marketing program under which the BISQM module falls. These programme learning goals describe the knowledge and skills that students should acquire in the program, and are divided into a number of broad themes including - disciplinary knowledge, social responsibility, global issues, critical thinking, analytical thinking, synthesis, information literacy, communication skills, evidence-based decision-making, quantitative analysis, ethics, teamwork, integration, and technology. One section of the guidelines describes *technology agility*, and suggests a number of learning goals including:

- *Evidence-based decision making that integrates current and emerging technologies including the application of statistical tools and techniques, data management, data analytics and information technology throughout the curriculum as appropriate;*
- *Understanding of the role of technology in society, including behavioral implications of technology in the workplace*
  (AACSB, 2018, p. 35)*.*

Evaluation of the B.A. Marketing programme, as part of accreditation processes, may include: (a) an examination of the intended learning outcomes for each module in that programme; (b) review of the teaching materials for the module to include handouts, case studies, and textbooks; and (c) descriptions of the assessment regime and grading system (EQUIS, 2018).

Assessment

Formative assessment in *Information Systems* occurs near the end of the first term and comprises optional submission of one essay, similar in format and structure to a final exam question. For *Quantitative Methods,* formative assessment occurs near the end of the second term, and require students to perform general data analyses (using the standard industry software) on a small dataset of companies, and submit the results in the form of an essay. Essays are submitted electronically (email) to teaching faculty, and formative feedback is returned electronically (via email) or printed.

Summative assessment designed by teaching staff from the two faculty divisions, consists of a single three-hour examination accounting for 100% of the final grade. The exam is taken at the end of the academic year, typically three to six weeks after the last lecture/seminar for the module. The exam comprises two sections, *Information Systems* and *Quantitative Methods* sections and, as an open book exam, students are allowed to bring in any reference material including written notes and one textbook. The exam sections

are equally weighted – each section contributes 50% to the final grade. For the *Information Systems* section of the exam, students are required to answer 2 out of 5 essay questions; and for *Quantitative Methods* all questions are mandatory. One external examiner has responsibility for moderation of exam scripts, and review of the final examination paper. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of students responded mostly/definitely agree to "*Preparing for the assessment helped my understanding of the module content*" and forty-six percent (46%) agreed that the final assessment method was suitable. However only twenty-eight percent (28%) of students agreed that the feedback on written work had been useful. Several students were partial to the open book format for the exam and some also commented on the relevancy of the assessment:

"*The formative assessment was fairly late in the year and was not every relevant in the final exam.*"
[A-level; Marketing]

"*[I liked] the open book exam. Plus I found that the mock helped a great deal with the first half of the exam*".
[A-level; Marketing]

"*I feel like the exam length was too long. The time duration didn't really make sense with what we had to complete in the exam*". [A-level; Marketing]

"*[I liked that] the exam was open book*" [A-level; Marketing]

"*[I disliked seminars] being in the computer room and then not doing a computer based exam*" [A-level, Law]

"*[I disliked that] the final assessment was 100% a written exam, this is unfair on others who don't like exams, more coursework would be recommended*". [BTEC, Marketing]

Broad guidelines of the AACSB suggest that any results of regular assessments should assist faculty in improving programs and modules.

> *By measuring learning, the school can evaluate its students' success at achieving learning goals, use the measures to plan improvement efforts, and (depending on the type of measures) provide feedback and guidance for individual students.*
> (AACSB, 2018, p. 33)

EQUIS (2018) further explicates "an appropriate balance between intellectual development and the development of managerial skills in the delivery and assessment of coursework" (p. 22) should be attained. Evaluation processes for both accreditation agencies also emphasise the evaluation of selected assessment methods used to measure achievement of learning outcomes.

Though EQUIS accreditation processes are at the institutional level, broad recommendations on programmes suggest that:

> *The design and content of programmes should embrace a comprehensive range of theory, firmly connected to the practical world of business and management in a local and international context...[and] employ a range of learning and teaching methods to optimise learning and the practical application of learning outcomes.*
> (EQUIS, 2018, p.18)

Teaching faculty may suggest changes to the structure of assessment methods, however any changes are made to assessment methods, requires coordination with other modules to ensure a balance is achieved in assessment approaches and structure.

Pedagogy

Students are divided into groups of approximately 18 – 20, for weekly one-hour seminars. Each group is comprised of students enrolled on either the B.A. Marketing course *or* the LLB Law with Business. The module content (topics taught weekly) is determined by the module teaching faculty from the Management department (Information Systems division) and the Economics department. The individual faculty responsible for the topic determines the two core textbooks for use in the module (one each for Information Systems and Quantitative Methods). Both texts are available as electronic resources through the university's library system. Prior to the start of the academic year, teaching faculty submit the reading lists to the library for the resources to be acquired and made available to students.

During the first half of the year (Business Information Systems) the seminars are held in a traditional classroom. Students typically discuss case studies on topics raised during lectures the previous week including the strategic use of information systems by businesses, and core theory on data, information and knowledge. These case studies are distributed to students at the beginning of the seminar, and are also available for download from the module's web page. Students are encouraged to discuss the case studies as part of a group and feedback to the tutor on specific points of discussion.

At the beginning of the second half of the academic year, students are provided with a workbook for quantitative methods. This workbook provides a weekly breakdown of the activities to be covered during each seminar. Topics include the use of Microsoft Excel and SPSS for data analysis.

All weekly seminars are facilitated in computer labs which are equipped with computer equipment (CPU/monitor) for each student. Two projection screens available for the lecturer to access using a computer. Students are encouraged to bring their quantitative workbooks to each seminar, and follow the steps for completion of the exercises. Students may also access an electronic copy of the workbook.

One-hour weekly lectures occur at the end of each week. The lectures for both topics – business information systems and quantitative methods - are facilitated in a traditional classroom environment. One of the lectures, typically during the first half of the academic year (business information systems), is delivered by a guest lecturer from the local business community.

In response to "*The teaching on the module was of a high standard*," twenty-sex percent (26%) of students agreed, and

	Faculty	**Students**	**Business Community**
Curriculum (Learning Outcomes and Content)	• Standards for LOs from external standardisation agencies • Little input from stakeholders (students, businesses) in design • LOs provided to students in handbook • Extended review and approval processes for LOs • Content based on designed learning outcomes • Silo approach to content delivery • Selection of resources based on availability	• LOs in handbook but not fully understood and not emphasised • Relevancy of outcomes (and content) to overall course not clear • Little input to LOs • Irrelevancy of content to overall course and career	• Learning outcomes and content should reflect expectations of stakeholders • Few structures available to provide feedback to module teaching faculty • Students should also possess 'soft skills'
Assessment	• As a 20 credit module covering full academic year, assessment must be done at end of academic year	• Poor timing of assessments • Unhelpful formative assessments • Assessment structure not consistent • Computer-based exam	• Assessments to evaluate students achievement of learning goals, and provide feedback/guidance
Pedagogy	• Information systems taught in traditional classroom; application of theory through use of case studies in seminars • Quantitative methods taught in computer labs; application of theory through computer-based tasks in seminars	• Lectures/seminars not engaging • Lectures provide little content	• *Employ a range of learning and teaching methods to optimise learning and the practical application of learning outcomes*

Table 4: Summary – Stakeholder perspectives in module design

twenty-five percent (25%) of students agreed that sufficient guidance from teaching staff was available when needed. Approximately the same number of respondents (28%) indicated that the learning resources were of a high standard.

Comments from students on the module teaching included:

. *"I did not like the lectures. They weren't intellectually stimulating and weren't engaging, this is for both BIS and QM, but mainly BIS."* [A-level; Marketing]

"The seminars weren't very helpful whereas the lectures were more straightforward and relevant to exam at the end." [A-level; Marketing]

"[I disliked] the lectures as they had very little content" [A-level; Law]

Table 4 summarises the key stakeholder perspectives from our findings, which address our primary research question: *What are the perspectives of multiple stakeholders on curriculum design processes?* In achieving this primary aim of this research, we also discovered what it is about the module that cause students to disengage and underperform, and the role that the teaching team plays across the two parts in understanding barriers to the integration of material. Reasons include - the developmental sequence; the delivery of material; use of enmeshed and coherent cases and examples; the final assessment; and consistency across the teaching team. Thus, in the following section which addresses our second research question - *What are possible approaches to integration of multiple stakeholder perspectives in curriculum design?* - we also discuss some of the modular changes that may be implemented to improve some of the discrepancies apparent in the module.

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES IN CURRICULUM DESIGN

An early exploration of the research results highlighted the pivotal role of learning outcomes – teaching faculty use learning outcomes for content development and delivery; accreditation agencies use LOs as a core measure for standardisation; and assessment of students focused on the achievement of these LOs. However the level of importance attributed to the LOs differ across stakeholders – though the external business community may place emphasis on the importance of LOs in determining the significance of a specific module, at the opposite end of the spectrum, students display little understanding of their (LOs) relevance to their chosen course or career, and thus compartmentalise the module content.

This lack of understanding may be improved by more active participation in curriculum design processes, however the few mechanisms that do exist to elicit student feedback have been generally ineffective - the lack of detailed student feedback via course committee meetings may be attributed to the presence of respective module leaders at meetings or a general lack of understanding of the requirements; and the structure of standardised surveys used (national student survey and EVASYS) invariably centres student responses on personal attributes and teaching styles of individual lecturers. Thus a different approach to gaining this feedback from students is critical.

Specific to the external business community, there is a demand for management education students to not only possess the relevant knowledge with the inclusion of experiential learning elements, but also acquire *soft skills* such as creative thinking, communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and leadership. However, there is little overlap in how these knowledge and skills are acquired and applied – between the module-specific knowledge gained within the

classroom, and the soft skills training provided external to the module. This suggests a more integrated approach to skills development – where students can apply and adapt their skills based on challenges faced within a business environment.

With respect to the module assessments – though the single summative assessment (contributing 100% to the final grade) achieved an acceptable balance in assessment activities for first year students on the Marketing course, students commented its timing as it occurs at least five months after the final lecture/seminar for *Business Information Systems*. Other highlighted issues of concern with respect to assessment structures included:

1. *Timing of formative and summative assessments do not facilitate effective feedback to students;*
2. *University-wide policies discourage the use of multiple points of assessments (summative);*
3. *Extensive use of technology in data analyses; however paper-based final assessment; and*
4. *Divided approach to structure of summative assessment*

However in examining these issues of misalignment several alternative strategies have emerged from the literature: 'sustainable assessment' (Boud, 2000; Boud and Soler, 2016), 'authentic assessment' (Mueller, 2005; James and Casidy, 2016) and 'assessment for confidence' (Meer and Chapman, 2014). An effective approach suggests a combination of authentic assessment methods - adopting tasks similar to those that may be encountered in a business environment (Mueller, 2005; Fook and Sidhu, 2010) - with traditional modes of assessment that include multiple choice and essay questions. This combined approach to assessment presents a more viable approach than a single mode of assessment (James and Casidy, 2016). Hibbert (2016) further asserts that "assessment regimes in the first year help students to development an early sense of achievement and confidence" (p. 5), and an 'assessment for confidence' model as suggested by Meer and Chapman (2014) which encompasses key characteristics for assessment including: (a) deliver the assessment early, within 4 weeks of starting the course; (b) the assessment should provide a low-stakes opportunity for success; (c) the assessment should offer a quick turnaround for marking; and (d) written and oral feedback should be provided.

Hibbert (2016) asserts that curriculum and course content should be structured so that students can see the *practical relevance* of it. This suggests that learning elements be incorporated that afford students the opportunity to develop their practical skills and knowledge. This may be in the form of coursework where student groups submit a final business report and presentation. The experiential learning elements can be designed to scaffold learning and reinforce cognitive learning of theoretical aspects through practical application. Group sessions may also be modelled to encourage students to generate their own knowledge within a constructivist learning environment. Our final concern related to the wording of the module learning outcomes. As a management education module, we asserted the need to include language that reflected the experiential learning elements included in

Old learning outcomes	New learning outcomes
a. Describe major classes of information systems, their source data, and functions	To explore the role of data, metrics and information systems in business/marketing practice
b. Develop a basic understanding of issues affecting the use of information systems within organisations.	To produce information from data using industry standard software
c. Apply basic information systems concepts in an organisational context.	Interpret observed data patterns and relationships for solving specific business challenges
d. Interpret representations and summaries of univariate and bi-variate data relating to business & marketing.	To apply statistical techniques to solve quantitative business problems
e. Analyse output from both specialist statistical and general office software.	Design an effective database using data from relevant published sources
f. Gather business data from published sources.	Demonstrate proficiency with some data analytical tools
g. Conduct and interpret basic quantitative analysis using software	As part of a team, prepare a professional business report which clearly communicates data analytical results to a wide audience

Table 5: Redesigned Learning Outcomes

the module. The key issues emerging from the analysis with respect to the module content include:

1. *Silo approach to content delivery with teaching faculty for each topic from separate departments;*
2. *Structure for delivery determined by teaching faculty and availability of resources*

Module Changes

We summarise the suggested module changes below:

1. *Use of student focus groups to facilitate feedback on course structure and content*

   The current approaches to facilitate feedback from students on key course issues are not effective, and there is a perceived lack of student understanding on what is required. The use of a focus group (facilitated by other students) as part of this study provided students the opportunity to reflect on learning experiences, and in turn think critically about their own learning expectations and assumptions of the module. We assert that this approach provides a more effective environment for eliciting student feedback than through staff-student committee meetings or standardised surveys, and encourage more active participation of students in the design of teaching strategies and methods (Bovill et al, 2011A; Healey et al, 2014).

2. *Establish structures to facilitate feedback from businesses to teaching faculty*

   Though current mechanisms exist for soliciting feedback from the business community, teaching faculty do not directly benefit from this expertise on specific topic areas for the module. Feedback from employers for students on work placements or from alumni members through the business school's extensive alumni association can be facilitated by online surveys or questionnaires. Such

feedback provides relevant and up-to-date insight into the technical skills-based competencies that students require within a professional environment.

3. *Changes to assessment structure*
    Meer and Chapman (2014) suggest the introduction of the first assessment early in the first year to provide a 'low-stakes opportunity for success' (p. 190) and include some of the following characteristics (a) deliver the assessment early, within 4 weeks of starting the course; (b) the assessment should provide a low-stakes opportunity for success; (c) the assessment should offer a quick turnaround for marking; and (d) written and oral feedback should be provided. Modular changes may therefore include:
    1. Move from a single point of assessment to multiple points of assessment; and
    2. Use of the technologies in assurance of learning processes - individual assessments may be in the form of online quizzes which will facilitate immediate feedback to students.

4. *Integration of Content*
    Students perceive a lack of continuity across modules within the same year of study, or across years. Students may therefore find it difficult to establish conceptual links, and thus struggle to understand the relevancy of the module to the course as a whole. Content should reflect the integrated nature of the two topics – information systems and quantitative methods. The redesigned learning outcomes would highlight the use of information systems for data analysis, and their function in key business decision-making processes. Thus the proposed change from *Business Information Systems and Quantitative Methods* module to one named *Business Analytics*. Though the same topics may be addressed in the newly named module, it provides students with a more integrated approach to content delivery and assessment.

5. *Redesign of Learning Outcomes*
    Changes to the designed learning outcomes were suggested as illustrated in Table 5, as the current learning outcomes emphasised the divided focus on the two topics of information systems and quantitative methods. The focus is thus changed to the integration of key experiential elements into the curriculum (as indicated by business community), and further opportunities for applying *soft (*employability) skills.
    However though the redesigned module learning outcomes offer additional experiential learning elements, students may lack an understanding of the contextual application of key employability (*soft)* skills within a practical setting. Merely changing the learning outcomes may not be sufficient in addressing the inclusion of these skills into the curriculum. Though students receive additional training in employability skills through workshops offered by the university, an understanding of the contextual application of these skills is not apparent within the current curriculum. EQUIS (2018) identify skills

Cognitive/intellectual skills	Personal/Interpersonal skills:
- Cognitive skills of critical thinking, analysis and synthesis - Effective problem solving using appropriate quantitative and qualitative skills - Numeracy, mathematical and quantitative skills - Statistical data analysis and management science skills - Effective use of communication and information technology for business applications - Project management skills - Ability to conduct research into business and management issues	- Effective communication using a range of media (including preparation and presentation of business reports) - Effective self-management in terms of time, planning and behaviour, (etc.) - Effective performance within a team environment - Interpersonal skills of effective listening, negotiating, persuasion and presentation - Self-reflection and criticality including self-awareness, openness and sensitivity to diversity

Table 6: Core graduate skills (EQUIS, 2018)

that graduates should be able to demonstrate (as illustrated in Table 6) and further suggests that *"This can be achieved through a variety of means including among others: case studies, work experience/internships, projects, market research and visiting speakers".* However one key issue emerging from this study is not only on how students apply these skills, and an understanding of how students can adapt based on the work environment in which they are placed. We thus suggest a closer examination of the approaches taken to integrate these skills into the course curriculum.

LIMITATIONS

"It is clear that different disciplines with varied requirements from professional bodies, different cohort sizes and varied confidence levels of students and tutors will influence what is possible within co-created curricula" (Bovill et al, 2011B, p. 203)

The study was limited to a single core undergraduate business module in order to gain an initial understanding of some of the contradictions that may occur in curriculum redesign. The limitations of the framework used are inherent in its design as it narrows research to an examination of lateral stakeholder relationships that may exist. Extending this research to include more business and management education modules at the undergraduate level, and include more in-depth analyses with stakeholders through interviews and focus groups for example, will help to facilitate further insight into respective stakeholder relationships. Thus it is expected that further research using a larger sample of modules, and longitudinal studies on modules that have undergone a curriculum redesign process, will provide richer data for the development of a more accurate framework for systemic exploration of these relationships.

This study used stakeholder theory to examine some of the inter-relationships that underlie curriculum design processes. Such an approach limits the researcher to an examination of the individuals responsible for curriculum design, focusing on the relationships between students, teaching faculty and the external business community. However, we assert that to understand possible issues of misalignment and where these

issues may occur, requires an examination of all objects used in curriculum design to include both human (stakeholders) *and* non-human elements (such as technologies and other resources used in assessment and pedagogy).

> *"Instead of looking at the factors that can be positioned to explain differences between the prescribed, described and enacted curriculum to bring about their closer alignment, we need to examine more closely the actors in the multiplicity of curriculum-making practices."*
> (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010, p. 58)

This approach thus draws strongly on Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to understand the possibly complex relationships that may occur as these objects or actors interact within the network. Our research therefore provides a further opportunity to explore the significance of ANT for understanding of these multiple perspectives in management education curriculum design processes. Though not extensively used in the field of education (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010), *Actor-Network Theory* as a social constructivist approach becomes useful in understanding such a network of heterogeneous relationships (Law and Callon, 1997), of how "actors and organisations mobilise, juxtapose and hold together the bits and pieces out of which they are composed" (Law, 1992, p. 6). Thus actors (both human and non-human entities) not only serve to initiate or create the relationships that occur in this network but are also in turn defined by and are the result of these relationships.

> *"Actor-network theory examines the associations of human and non-human entities in the performance of the social, the economic, the natural, the educational, etc. The objective is to understand precisely how these things come together – and manage to hold together, however temporarily – to form associations that produce agency and other effects: for example, ideas, identities, rules, routines, policies, instruments and reforms."*
> (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010, p. 3)

However more in-depth study is required to explore the validity of this model for extending this research to other modules in Business and Management as: "There are four things that do not work with actor-network theory: the word actor, the word network, the word theory and the hyphen!" (Latour, 1999, p. 23)

ONGOING RESEARCH

Based on our research findings, and that of past research studies, we suggest that the fragmented approach to the design of learning outcomes is one of the key points of failure in curriculum design processes for management education. The divided focus between developing scholarly competencies, and providing experiential learning elements for students is highlighted in the study, particularly for first year graduates who may not have had prior opportunities to apply their knowledge gained in studies within a practical setting. Several issues were highlighted including ineffectual approaches for feedback from key stakeholders and the lengthy administrative processes inherent in curriculum design. One other unanticipated issue related to current approached to integration of necessary soft skills (as highlighted by the business community) in the curriculum. Our initial research in this area examined studies by Whetten and Cameron (2011), Albanese (1989), and Bandura (1977) discussing the development of management competencies, typically based on social learning theory where focus is on developing the "skill(s) and/or personal characteristic(s) that contributes to effective managerial performance" (Albanese, 1989).

We briefly examined this competency-based approach in other disciplines such as the holistic, integrated framework used in the medical profession which provides the basis for the development of learning outcomes. According to Harden et al (1999), learning outcomes for medical professionals should not only address defined areas of competence and indicate the relationships between different outcomes, but also support a clear progression from one year of study to the next. The framework is illustrated by *three concentric circles* such that:

(a) The defined learning outcomes in the *inner circle* of the framework describe what the practitioner should be able to do – assessable technical skills that are typically acquired through formal training;

(b) The *middle circle* encapsulates those learning outcomes that describe approaches to the outcomes in the inner circle, the "academic, emotional, analytical and creative intelligences" that the practitioner possesses (Harden et al, 1999);

(c) The *outer circle* demonstrates the personal intelligences of the individual.

Our initial exploration also highlighted the adoption of the competency-based approach by human resource (HR) professionals. The LBIT (Leadership, Business, Interpersonal and Technical) model focuses on how these technical and behavioural competencies can lead to development of the HR professional (SHRM, 2016; Alonso at al, 2015).

Specific to management education, Boyatzis and Saatcioglu (2008) the competencies that define an outstanding manager tend to include abilities from three clusters: (a) cognitive intelligence competencies; (b) emotional intelligence abilities such as adaptability; and (c) social intelligence competencies such as networking. However in management education "…many faculty members still see competency development as the responsibility of the career placement office…So in universities, there is a double challenge. First, there is the question as to whether or not the methods yield graduates who can and will use the competencies to be effective. Second, are these competencies integrated into the curriculum" (p. 94). However a brief examination of the literature highlights a discussion of competency-based approaches within the realm of graduate management education. We thus intend to explore and understand such an approach at the *undergraduate* level in management education.

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