Pedagogy and Evaluation: The Challenge for Business and Management Degree Courses in the 21st Century

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Abstract: The twenty first century has been a period of major change for business organisations and industries. This has led to an ever greater interest in and demand for managers with not only the traditional subject knowledge and technical skills but also individual business skills. To meet these demands business schools are under pressure to adapt their courses appropriately and to innovate. For an undergraduate degree in business management, this includes both the structure of the degree, the subjects covered, the teaching methods used and the whole student learning experience. But innovation poses a major challenge for researchers and teachers alike – how can the effect of an innovation be measured or assessed? This paper assesses the current state of evaluation methods applied in Business Schools. Student feedback has emerged as the dominant approach, but application is still at a fairly basic level. A case example of evaluating the new first year redesign of the business management degree at City's Business School is used to illustrate the practical issues involved. Student feedback offers some indication of the success of the redesigned degree, but it does not entail any constructive dialogue between students and lecturers, and students often lack the skills to frame feedback constructively. The paper discusses the implications of changes in the business context for the evaluation methods used in Business Schools.

Keywords: 21st century business, constructivist methods, evaluation of learning, student feedback methods, business management degree

1. Introduction

The teaching methods and pedagogy on undergraduate courses in business and management are undergoing significant change. Business trends, developments in learning theory and information and communications technology (ICT), new ideas for pedogogy and now the covid crisis are all helping to drive these changes. Attitudes to student learning are also changing. It is now accepted that teaching methods are only one of several factors that affect student learning at undergraduate level. Business Schools are working to improve all aspects of the student learning experience. Government, funding and regulatory bodies and teaching staff all want to establish the value of these innovations. Hence the concern with evaluation methods of student learning.

The 21st century has brought major changes to some business sectors. These effects are beginning to alter the manager's job, making demands for new personal skills such as team management, managerial intuition and 'learnability'. In particular, managers are being faced with unique situations for which business theory is only a partial help. For first year inexperienced business undergraduates these will be rather alien concepts. To meet this challenge, educationists have been developing new teaching approaches – the most significant of which features constructivist methods using student centred exercises. These can develop into major costly management projects requiring a high level of teaching staff time in their design and execution. Assessing the value of such major changes in teaching practice to the student learning experience is proving to be a challenge.

This paper aims to assess the current state of evaluation methods for Business School undergraduate courses. It outlines the changing objectives of evaluation (section 2) and changing educational needs of business students (section 3). Section 4 reviews how Business Schools are dealing with these pressures. A case example of evaluating the new first year redesign of the business management degree at City's Business School is used to illustrate the practical issues involved (section 5). Student feedback has emerged as a major factor and section 6 discusses the implication of this.

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2. The challenge of evaluating Business School undergraduate degree courses

Evaluation is an important step in monitoring and assessing the success of business operations of all types. All evaluators have a preference for hard objective measures (numerical scores etc) that have been developed based on a scientific approach. This enables various types of comparisons that can be used to assess performance quickly and easily. But intangible benefits and costs have proved difficult to measure and if the performance of an operation depends on multiple contributing factors, evaluation becomes a complex and contentious activity. Student learning on business courses fits this description. It is a complex individual activity. But the learning environment provided by the business school (involving a number of factors many of which are hard to assess) is thought to be a key component of student performance.

Evaluation of student learning for subjects taught by traditional transmissive methods of lecture and coursework lent itself to the long-time approach of assessment by written and/or aural examination. Academic staff were held to high academic standards, but comparatively little attention was directed at teaching quality (Kane et al, 2002). Students that had been accepted for degrees were assumed capable of managing their own learning. The initial aim was to sort students by achievement – to distinguish those students who understood the subject being taught at least on a basic level from those that did not. For some subjects (notably medicine) the aim was (and still is) to establish that students who passed had achieved a level of competence that rendered them fit to practice their chosen profession.

This attitude has undergone a perceptible change in the 21st century. The increasing heterogeneity and size of student cohorts and the high costs of education for both student and business schools has led to a greater concern for the student learning experience. There are a number of factors that affect student learning-

- Course delivery (teaching skills of academic staff, teaching methods adopted, physical environment resources such as classrooms, library, social working spaces, food outlets…).
- Administrative support (course office efficiency, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) equipment and user support)
- Personal support services to help students to manage their living environment (housing, illness, mental problems, family and financial problems, culture shock).

Further education institutions and their teaching staff now take responsibility for and work to improve all three aspects of student experience (Revitalising support for overseas Chinese students, 2020). Ease of learning has become as important as the original focus on measurement of learning achieved.

Evaluating how well these factors work together to create the student learning experience is presenting a challenge that concerns all stakeholders (university senior management, business school academic staff, business and management students, course directors, potential employers, funding organisations..).

3. Business trends and the changing role of managers

The effective management of organisations has been recognised as an important factor in their success, since the early 20th century (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Colby et al, 2011; Bloom et al, 2017). The demand for professional managers drove Business Schools to recognise and develop theory for the key business disciplines. The resulting success of this approach was based on the application of the relevant discipline theory to well understood problems. With the arrival of the twenty first century however the profound and accelerating changes (Economist, December 2019) in the industrial, organisational, social and environmental scene requires managers that can not only apply business theory in non-standard situations but are also equipped with the skills to deal with unique situations needing individual judgement (Martin and Golby-Smith, 2017). Moreover we are now all managers for at least part of our working life.

Organisations are facing an unprecedented range of external challenges. Technology, especially information and communications technology (ICT), has driven major changes in the ways organisations can organise and control their operations, as for example the supply chain (D'Aveni, 2018). The internet has spawned new types of companies such as social media and platform organisations like Airbnb, creating major changes to the competitive environment for many companies. Consumer retail behaviour seems to be undergoing continuous change – notably the move online and the expectations of continuous innovation in products and services. This level of change seems likely to intensify (D'Aveni, 2018).

Standards of behaviour at both company level and individual managerial level are undergoing social and community pressure. Organisations, including business companies, are being expected to be accountable to a much wider range of groups than just to their shareholders and customers – as was the case in the last century. Other stakeholder's interests are becoming difficult to ignore, including - suppliers, the well-being of employees, physical and environmental impact on the local community and on the world community through contribution to climate change. The recent high profile movements of #metoo (https://metoomvmt.org/) and #blacklivesmatter (https://blacklivesmatter.com/) started on the social media platform Twitter signals the changing attitudes to the use (and misuse) of personal power in all types of social and work situations. Organisational culture is no longer a subject of academic debate and analysis but an urgent living issue for all stakeholders. Organisations need managers capable of responding proactively and effectively to such demands.

But perhaps most demanding of all is the effects of potential major crises such as the Covid pandemic of spring 2020. This brought the issue of resilience to the fore. The concept of supply chains that refocus on 'just in case' from that of the late 20th century mantra of 'just in time', has emerged as a result of the problems of obtaining health supplies experienced by most European countries in the early stages of the pandemic (Aldrick P, 2020).

Business disciplines are developing new ideas and theories. Research into human behaviour has established how erratic our behaviour as consumers and managers can be (Kahneman, 2011) – adding another branch of knowledge to economics. Traditional leadership theory emphasises the value of vision and goal setting whereas more recent theorists extoll the value of leadership that enables and supports creativity in the workforce (Martin and Golby-Smith, 2017; Hill and Davis, 2017). The 20th century focus on competitive strategy is morphing in some sectors into another type of strategy which emphasises innovation (Kim Chan and Mauborgne, 2005, 2017; Martin and Golby-Smith, 2017). Managers need a 'deep understanding' (Ramsden (1992) of up to date business theory in order to be able to apply it effectively in new and potentially unique business situations.

Managers at all levels are facing new and unusual situations, in which they will need to make their own judgement Colby et al, 2011). Andrew Likierman (cited in the economist, Bartleby July 18th 2020) defines judgement as 'the combination of personal qualities with relevant knowledge and experience to form opinions and take decisions'. Personal qualities encompass not only a wide range of managerial skills but the whole personality.

Managerial skills can be categorised into three groups-basic business skills, people management skills and high level personal skills (table 1). Basic skills are those needed for standard office work (including up to date software) and a manager's own individual personal work. Most are used to achieve a specific mostly measurable outcome such as a budget (spread sheet) or a report written for and presented to the board. People management, 'soft skills' guide our interaction with other people (co-workers, customers, team members, senior management, suppliers). As business life moves towards working in teams and projects with the need for co-operation between workers with different skills, getting employees working together effectively and harmoniously is becoming more and more important for all organisations.

High level personal skills encompass a wide range of intangible human abilities and behaviour (see table 1). These are becoming increasingly important to every-day business life. Critical skills are accepted as a key skill for research, seen as important aspect of business life (Rich et al, 2019). The rationality-intuitive debate (Sadler-Smith and Shely, 2004) has established the dissatisfaction of executives with decision making based only on rational grounds. Many managers have accepted their successful use of 'gut feel' or managerial intuition for complex situations in which limited information is available and outcomes will be affected by a considerable amount of uncertainty. Planning problems are good examples. These were identified by Rittel and Webber (1973) as wicked problems - unique, ill-defined, dependent on particular time and place and open-ended. Paradox is constant feature of organisational life. Lewis (2000) suggests that paradox 'may denote a wide variety of contradictory yet interwoven elements.., but it is socially constructed as actors attempt to make sense of an increasingly intricate ambiguous world'. Typical organisational examples are the tension between control and flexibility (Quinn R and Rohrbaugh, John, 1983) and for individual workers between self-expression and group cohesion. Exploring and managing paradox can offer companies great benefit in exploiting the potential of the apparently conflicting options (Lewis, 2000).

Table 1: Managerial Skills required for 21st century business

Basic business skills	People Management – soft skills	High level personal skills
Numeracy – spread sheet use	Leadership – all levels of the organisation	Judgement (phronesis)
Report writing – word processing	Communication both face to face and virtual– listening, contributing, conversational	Managerial intuition
Presentations – verbal fluency and computer presentation software use	Team working – both as member and leader; skills of collaboration	Problem solving; thinking holistically
Project management	Managing dysfunctional groups; giving effective feedback	Critical thinking
Time management	Managing meetings – preparation and control	Learning from experience; observation and reflection
Mastery of standard office software	Managing diversity and innovation – dealing with different national cultures	Innovative and creative thinking; entrepreneurial skills
Mastery of virtual communication tools	Managing groups, departments and firms	Managing ambiguity & paradox
Mastering new computer packages quickly	Demonstration of respect for others, Sensitivity to changing social norms	Managing one's own and other's Continuous learning
Negotiating	influencing skills	'learnability'. Evaluating and applying findings to new problems

Managers are not just knowledge users and a collection of skills but function as an integrated personality. Their ability to deploy their managerial skills and knowledge is affected by personal characteristics such as self awareness, integrity, energy, enthusiasms, ambition and motivation. As a result the manager's job is changing. It is now the quality of a manager's world view, personal judgement, character and intangible managerial skills as much as business and subject discipline knowledge that ensures successful business and organisational performance.

4. The implications of the changing role of managers for business courses

Business Schools are grappling with the implications of these demands for business course design and teaching methods. The covid-19 pandemic of 2020 posed a crisis for university teaching which is accelerating the trend in the use of online facilities. Developing evaluation methods for student learning is becoming less of a priority in the face of the need to develop appropriate teaching methods.

4.1 Business School responses to the pressures to change for teaching business courses

The process for periodic revision and redesign of courses is an established part of university operations. Major redesigns can change the structure and character of an existing course as a whole. But in a modular structure, which is now the norm in the UK university sector, new modules can be introduced, and the learning outcomes and coverage of existing modules revised, to meet changing requirements. The subject discipline developments are the responsibility of module leaders and this is a type of change that universities understand and handle well. But the business sector's demands for the addition of new subjects (such as ethics after the financial crisis of 2008-2009) and skills training is more challenging. Because incremental change in course design and content is possible, a sequence of minor changes over time can have a major cumulative effect.

The greatest changes have been to the student learning environment. There has been an immense amount of investment in the physical facilities and technology resources of many universities. This tends to be directed towards flipped classrooms, lecture halls and the creation of a campus layout to encourage student socialisation. There has been a steady enhancement of ICT facilities notably virtual learning environments (VLEs) such as Moodle. Student support functions such as career planning, counsellors for mental and other problems, housing etc have also been greatly enhanced over the last few decades.

A much greater emphasis has been placed on developing academic staff teaching skills. The development of Med Courses in education (Shaw, 2017), the creation of central departments staffed with experts in teaching

and learning research and the attention paid to teaching skills on recruitment of new academic staff all attest to the increasing importance placed on teaching.

Innovation in teaching methods for business courses has been the subject of particular interest and research since the latter part of 20th century. From the early years of this century, The Higher Education Academy Business subject centre held teaching and learning conferences every year and this was taken over by the Association of Business schools in 2012. It has been run every year since then (https://charteredabs.org/).The growing body of evidence from learning theory on the importance of student engagement (Gibbs, 2010) for learning has led to a steady development of various new types of teaching methods aimed at obtaining student interest- notably the increasing use of constructivist methods. These methods often involve small groups of students. The increasing power and range of facilities provided by ICT being developed in parallel, has supported and enabled this type of teaching for the large class sizes now a feature of undergraduate education. The next section describes the implications of these developments.

4.2 Deep learning, skills development and Constructivist Pedagogy

Ramsden (1992) discussed the distinction between 'deep' and 'surface' learning, where deep learning involves a critical approach to a subject, and a thorough understanding of concepts. Surface learning, by comparison, refers to the collection of facts and theories and developing the ability to use them in a mechanistic manner, but in the process acquiring only a limited understanding of the underlying concepts. Deep learning has come to be seen as an important outcome for student learning (Gibbs, 2010; Marton and Saljo, 1976) and is of particular importance for business students. They need this level of understanding of each business discipline in order to be able to apply the theory to ever changing business situations. According to Gibbs (2010) there are four key elements that can be shown to support the learning process – 'class size, the level of student effort and engagement, who undertakes the teaching and the quantity and quality of feedback to students on their work' (Gibbs, 2010, section 1.4). The importance of student engagement has led to a shift from relying mainly on the traditional lecture to adding courses and exercises that use a 'constructivist' approach where students collaborate on the creation of knowledge (Goodyear, 2001; Chickering and Gamson, 1987). Laurillard (2003) suggested a 'conversational' model of learning based around a dialogue between student and teacher which would take place simultaneously at two levels, one connected with practical issues and the other with theoretical and conceptual understanding (Healey M, Flint A, and Harrington K, 2014).

Constructivist methods require significantly more teaching and organisational resources than traditional methods – both in design and delivery. Moreover the expansion of student numbers of recent decades, on business degrees compounds the management problem of delivering constructivist (small group) teaching. Any courses using this approach become serious management projects. Descriptions of the use of Problem based learning (PBL) establish the many factors that must be planned in detail (Ungaretti et al, 2015). Most commentators agree that key to the success is the quality and relevance of the practical exercise at the heart of the course and the effectiveness of the teaching staff (Loyens et al, 2011; Schmidt et al, 2009). In particular the quality and timeliness of the feedback offered to students by the teaching staff. The complexity of the teaching exercise also focuses a spotlight on the importance of monitoring the whole project closely in all aspects, with a view to dealing with serious student problems early in the course.

An astonishing range of student centred exercises being developed for business courses over recent decades- from highly structured team exercises to those giving considerable freedom to students to design and solve their own problems. Early examples include traditional Harvard type business analysis real life case (written by a researcher) posing specific (usually strategic) questions (Colby et al, 2011) to illustrate the value of applying business strategy models. Many exercises now use the resources of the web to create live cases for students to analyse.

These methods were originally proposed as a way of supporting deep learning. However student centred teaching can also be an effective way to develop personal skills of all types. Skills are learnt through practical experience (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988; Brown et al, 2015; Hill L, 1992). Hence the increasing interest in constructivist methods which not only support theory acquisition but are based on student practical work through which individual managerial skills can also be practiced.

Of the three types of skills needed by managers the basic skills have been taught on many business course for some decades. These skills have a specific measurable outcome. The relevant theory can be learnt through well

designed class exercises and the student skill achievement assessed by tutors running such classes (Gallagher, K., 2016). Presentation skills are a good example. There is a considerable amount of theory available on how to make good presentations. Students can be asked to make presentations to their groups and tutors on a whole variety of topics. Feedback (and marks) from both peers and tutor both supports and measures their skill level.

However people management skills and high level personal skills present a more complex problem. Both types of skills are context dependent. The effective manager needs to be able to exercise these skills in widely differing situations. The theory of organisational behaviour and management underpins much of current thinking about best practice for people management skills (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2010; Boddy D, 2017). Student team or group based exercises offer experience of many of these personnel skills. They are effective if students are assessed on both the exercise outcomes and the way the team/group managers the team operations. Learning comes from the feedback given by the team members to each other and from the tutor to both the group of students working together and the individual student. Feedback needs to analyse individual incidents using the appropriate reference to organisational behaviour theory. Although team based coursework projects are used widely within business courses these will not generate much learning of people skills unless the exercise is structured to assess the team and individual member behaviour as well as the discipline related topic.

High level skills are a diverse set (table 1). Theory is less well established and tends to be specific to each skill. Problem solving has a long history of theoreticians working to develop ideas for solving problems holistically (Boddy, 2017). Intuition and the management of ambiguity and paradox have only recently been accepted as significant managerial skills. Theory that describes managerial intuition (Sadler-Smith, Eugene and Burke, Lisa A, 2009) and paradox (Lewis, 2000) offering ways to develop the skill to use them is also a recent development. Critical thinking (Chatfield T, 2018) has a long history in academia but the importance of its application to management problems is also a comparatively recent development. The various forms of practice based case work - for example PBL (Schmidt et al, 2009; Ungaretti et al, 2015) and real life client's problems offer promising ways for students to encounter and practice these high level skills in a training environment. However as for the exercises in people management none of them will be effective unless the high level skill potentially involved is identified, discussed and student performance monitored and assessed. The current use of case exercises still tends to focus on the management problem or decision rather than the process of dealing with the situation presented in the exercise.

Figure 1: Constructivist case exercises

Student control	Design of activity Level of specification	Example activities; Skills Development
LOW	**High – specific measurable outcomes required**	**Basic Skills**
MODERATE	Detailed description of case outcome required management Process not specified	Team based exercises - People skills
HIGH	Activity aims described; some case description Case outcomes & management Process not specified	PBL; Consultancy; High level personal skills
STUDENT/STAFF CO-CREATION	Activity aims agreed jointly	Dissertation – all types of skills

Figure 1: Constructivist exercises and skills acquisition

4.3 Online teaching – the response to the Covid pandemic

For the university sector, the global pandemic of 2020 due to the spread of the Covid-19 virus from China, first to Europe and then to the rest of the world, created a crisis for course delivery. By March 2020 it had become clear that the virus posed a major threat to life and that it spread by close contact between people. Measures

by governments around the world to reduce the spread of the virus depended on curtailing travel, limiting the opportunities for people to congregate in large groups, introducing social distancing for all public places (individuals to keep at least 2 metres distance from any other person) and requiring infected individuals to self isolate for at least 14 days. A consequence of this was that by mid-March universities in most countries including the UK had cancelled conventional lectures. In place of the conventional face-to-face teaching most universities provided a measure of hastily assembled online teaching, often through a combination of existing video material, educational resources posted online making use of the VLEs in widespread use (such as Moodle) and video conferencing services such as Zoom (which had typically been used by universities to allow meetings to take place with staff and students remotely, but which were not part of their core educational activities). Hodges et al (2020) propose the term 'emergency remote teaching' for this rapid and unanticipated move online by institutions and courses which normally operate around face to face learning.

As the summer of 2020 progressed (the time of writing this paper) it became apparent that the start of the new academic year in September would take place in a context where there remained considerable restrictions on international travel and on the scope for students to mingle on campus. The university sector as a whole made plans to deliver the academic courses of 20/21 online. Academics began to determine approaches which were pedagogically sound, to make use of the strengths of this type of teaching (for example the flexibility of timing of delivery) and manage the problems (such as organising student discussions).

The unpredictable impact of Covid-19 on the university sector has been echoed with radical and unexpected changes to many other sectors as well. The move towards increased virtualisation in organisations of many sorts has been a subject of interest for business schools for some years. This trend was grounded in continuous improvement in technology. An unexpected event (the pandemic) has prompted a far more rapid move online for all organisations than previous assumptions about innovation would have forecast. This event reinforces the need for business schools to train their graduates to adjust to complex and ill-structured problems and strengthens the argument for a constructivist approach to learning.

4.4 Evaluation

Although business schools put a lot of effort into monitoring business trends, by talking to senior executives, reviewing professional and academic comment on the changing management role, drawing on their own academic staff's knowledge of relevant research and industry contacts and noting course developments at other institutions (including company in house training programmes), the process by which new courses are designed and existing courses revised is still a fairly informal one.

The assessment of individual student learning continues to be measured predominantly by traditional examination marks. The use of essay type questions – testing understanding and multiple choice – testing knowledge may vary widely between subjects. The enforced move to online teaching has led to alternatives such as 24 hour timed assessment. Coursework both group and individual has begun to play a significant part in student's module marks. Both exam and course work marks are aggregated up over all modules for the three years of the course to form the final student mark and the class of degree awarded. This is accepted as an objective measure of student learning. There are few if any proposals for ways to evaluate student's development of people management and higher level personal skills.

The effect of using the new types of teaching methods like constructivist approaches is considered significant but has proved difficult to evaluate. Comparatively minor changes such as that reported by Nicol (2007) in providing timely marking and feedback to students can be addressed by comparison of examination marks between cohorts (pre the change and after the change). This has some credibility provided the two cohorts (usually one year apart) have the same profile in all significant characteristics. More fundamental innovations such as the move from lecture/coursework to the use of Problem Based Learning (PBL) methods requires a research project in its own right, as the medical profession has demonstrated (Ozturk et al, 2008; Schmidt et al, 2009). An interesting feature of these research projects is that ultimately they depend to some extent on student self-assessment of their own skills in applying theoretical knowledge in their first jobs.

This leaves student feedback as the most significant evaluation method now being applied. Current methods include surveys in which students score a series of general questions at both course and module level, informal comment to individual staff members, group discussions such as focus groups and formal comment in committees. Student opinion surveys have evolved over the late 1990s and is now standard in some form for

modules, courses and schools. The most frequently used format is a survey of each cohort of students asking a series of questions to which students have a range of 5 choices with Likert scores from very poor(1) to excellent (5). These responses can be aggregated up to give an overall score for the module or degree course as required- a score that can be compared with previous years or other modules or even other institutions. The National Student Survey (NSS) survey (National Student Survey 2020) was of this type and its introduction in 2005 (Curtiss, 2005) probably marks the general acceptance by the university sector of the need for this type of student feedback on all modules. The module scores are now routinely used as a measure to evaluate individual academic staff teaching effectiveness. The effect of online teaching on student feedback is yet to be seen.

Table 2 summarises the evaluation measures in current use. Business schools are opting to focus on course design, delivery and the total package of services that make up the student learning experience, rather than developing additional evaluation methods for student learning.

Table 2: evaluation methods

Issue		**Evaluation methods**	**Type of measure**
Curriculum choice		Course director's and teaching staff judgement - from staff experience; business comment; academic research by business academics.	Qualitative data
Student learning		Written/ aural examination based on essay type questions, multiple choice questions quiz. Additional measures from coursework marks and staff assessment.	Quantitative numerical measures - marks
Ways to improve the student learning environment	Quality of teaching delivery – staff skills	Student feedback- teaching scores from student survey; peer discussions; peer review; performance on courses in education theory and teaching	Qualitative data; quantitative teaching scores
	physical facilities; ICT	Programme and Course director, teaching staff and tutors feedback; student feedback	Qualitative data
	Innovation in Teaching methods	Comparison of learning of previous and new methods rare Student Self-assessment at a later date in first jobs; Student feedback	Qualitative data
	Quality of feedback on student activities	Collection of data on time to give feedback; student feedback on quality of teaching staff feedback	Quantitative data - time Qualitative data
	Course administrative support	Student feedback; Programme and Course director, teaching staff and tutors feedback on student problems	Qualitative data
	Student support structures: counselling, housing etc	Student feedback; Programme and Course director, teaching staff and tutors feedback on student problems; Course administrator's assessment	Qualitative data

5. Case example of course redesign

This section focuses on a major redesign of the Business Management course within City's Business School. The Business School operates a cycle where periodic reviews of course content and structure takes place at least every six years and processes exist to manage the incremental development of the course between these reviews.

5.1 Recent redesigns

The most recent redesign took effect from the 2018-19 academic year with the first students to be enrolled in the new structure starting in September 2018. This was the third significant redesign in slightly more than ten years, in line with the six year periodic review cycle:

1. 2006 redesign including introduction of a new skills component developed using constructivist principles

2. 2012 redesign based around a slight reduction in the number of modules each year to shift the emphasis from content to practice
3. 2018 redesign to bring critical thinking and a greater emphasis on core knowledge and understanding into the first year and to develop students as active learners

The Business School already had a record of introducing revisions in response to external factors, notably the financial crisis of 2008 which had prompted a significant review of approaches to the teaching of business skills, building on the 2006 redesign. The financial crisis had been the impetus for a greater emphasis on intangibles and interpersonal skills in course content than had been the case before. The current approach to learning within the course was strongly influenced by decisions that had been made at this stage.

The planned structure of the 2018 redesigned degree was for a common first year taught to all students on the degree covering the key business subjects. This was to be followed by a choice from 5 distinct streams developed in the 2nd and 3rd years, comprising a general Business Management option and specialisms in Finance, Marketing, Entrepreneurship/Innovation, and International Business. Other streams, such as analytics and social enterprise, have been considered and an important consideration in designing the course was the ability to introduce new streams in the future. This offered students the chance to develop their chosen business specialism in greater depth than the previous structure had allowed, so that students were well equipped to work in their chosen specialism on completion of the degree course.

5.2 The redesigned first year modules

Students study eight modules during their first academic year. The subjects introduced fall into two groups – a set of core subjects (Organisational Behaviour, Economics, Marketing, Supply Chaim management and Accounting) and key business skills (Critical Thinking, Quantitative Methods and Managing Complexity). The first year of the redesign was delivered to a cohort of 360 students drawn from over 40 countries world-wide. A very wide range of teaching and learning approaches is used within the first year of the degree.

The core subjects

- *Organisational Behaviour.* The overarching purpose of this module was to introduce students to the key topics, theories, and frameworks that explain how organisations, and the people within them, work. . It followed a standard textbook closely. Teaching was by lecture and exercise classes.
- *Economics.* Recognising that economics principles are fundamental to an understanding of business management and also that the language of economics can be unfamiliar to many who encounter it for the first time, this module placed a strong emphasis on learning to 'think like an economist'. It followed a standard textbook closely. Teaching was by lecture and exercise classes.
- *Marketing.* Interaction was built into the lecture format with longer scheduled lectures and no separate tutorials. The students were expected to pre-read material for each session. The lecturer placed considerable emphasis, when designing the content and student activities, on the diverse nature of the cohort and the range of prior knowledge, not only of marketing but of everyday experiences as consumers which inform marketing concepts.
- *Supply Chain Management.* This module required students to carry out their own action research for the coursework. Students were expected to go out and discover an organisation of interest to them, and to determine how they could apply concepts from the module lectures to this organisation. Students were encouraged to carry out interviews or to observe processes as part of this assessment and were given guidance on how to do this ethically.
- *Financial and Management Accounting.* This module set out to provide a comprehensive understanding of accounting, as a means to understand and report information about an organisation. Teaching was by lecture and tutorials, which placed a strong emphasis on learning examples and practical skills.

The Business skills modules

- *Critical Thinking.* This module aimed to develop students' understanding of 'what is going on in any given situation through the use of reasoning, the evaluation of evidence and self-reflection on their own thinking processes' (Critical Thinking in Business handbook, 2018). The core design was based on the concepts of Problem Based Learning (PBL) (the only module to do this during the first year). The module was taught through ten weekly student led group discussion sessions. Students were organised into small groups and assigned a group tutor for the term.

- *Quantitative methods and analytics.* This module aimed to provide students with the level of numeracy necessary to progress to subsequent stages of their degree. It combined a grounding in mathematics for finance and statistics with an introduction to issues such as data visualisation. Teaching was by lecture and exercise classes.
- *Managing complexity and business skills.* This module aimed to teach both contemporary management thought dealing with a fast-changing and unpredictable business world and basic business skills. It combined lectures with student centred coursework assignment projects, careers workshops and tutorials on the basic business skills in which students' performance of various skills were marked by tutors.

Table 3: Modules – teaching methods and skills development

Module	**Teaching Method - Transmissive/ constructivist**	**Practice in Skills listed in table 1**
Organisational Behaviour	Transmissive	Basic business skills, People management, problem solving
Economics	Transmissive	Basic business skills, problem solving
Marketing	Combined transmissive and constructivist	Basic business skills, problem solving, innovative thinking,
Supply Chain	Transmissive with constructivist Coursework assignment	Basic business skills, people management - Team working, problem solving
Financial and management Accounting	Transmissive	Basic business skills - Numeracy
Critical Thinking	Constructivist	Basic business skills, people management - Team working; high level personal skills including – judgement, problem solving, innovative and critical thinking, learning from experience, managing ambiguity and learning, learnability
Quantitative Methods and Analytics	Transmissive	Basic business skills - Numeracy, problem solving and thinking holistically
Managing complexity and business skills	Constructivist	Basic business skills, people management – team working including dysfunctional ones, high level personal skills including managerial intuition, problem solving, innovative and critical thinking, learning from experience and learnability

Table 3 illustrates how constructivist methods are beginning to be used in differing ways to support traditional teaching approaches and as well as a core design for some modules. Comparing this with earlier versions of the course from before successive redesigns, constructivist approaches have increased in importance. Moreover the development of team working coursework assignments with constructivist exercises is offering ever greater opportunities for students to practice some of the skills identified in table 1. But the most significant part of this redesign is the introduction of two modules for which teaching business skills is part of the module learning aim. An integral part of the teaching method is the way coursework is designed and assessed. Table 5 (appendix 1) gives the details for each module.

5.3 Student feedback

Table 4: Student feedback

Main focus – specific to module or course?	Method applied by staff	Value – what this tells the staff
Individual Modules core subjects and quantitative methods	Written questionnaire on module as a whole (in line with universities standard policy – see appendix 2)	Engagement with lectures and tutorials and Contribution to and learning from practical exercises (where relevant)
Critical thinking	Written questionnaire on module as a whole (in line with universities standard policy – see appendix 2) Online questionnaires tailored to PBL approach	Extent of learning and participation through PBL approach
Managing Complexity and business skills	Written questionnaire on module as a whole (in line with universities standard policy – see appendix 2). Written questionnaires tailored to skills tutoring for individual tutors	Engagement with different components of the module and synthesis of learning from them
All Modules	Informal oral feedback to lecturers and tutors teaching the module.	Early warning of general problems on the module for whole class, Individual problems
The course as a whole	Staff-student liaison meeting discussions. Questionnaire generated by student representatives. Discussions with personal tutors and second year mentors. A series of focus groups led by an Educational Technologist.	Overall structure of the course. Relative importance of different modules. Adapting to learning as an undergraduate

Table 4 shows that student feedback was gathered through a number of channels. Given that delivery of the course as a whole depends on an extended team of lecturers and tutors, feedback which is channelled through tutors or which is provided by tutors themselves has proved extremely valuable. Lecturers and tutors can respond rapidly to problems which arise. Within the small-group settings which constitute an important component of several of the modules, tutors' tacit knowledge of how successful the teaching is, and how effectively students are engaging, can be extremely valuable.

The formal questionnaires concentrate on delivery quality as seen by the students. In practice several drawbacks became apparent:

- The questions presumed a didactic lecture-based approach to delivery
- The questionnaires were entirely focused on particular modules to the detriment of understanding the course as a whole
- The questionnaires were administered at the end of term and results were only available some weeks after that, limiting the scope for introducing changes in the light of questionnaire findings.
- Student response was disappointing. Most response rates did not exceed 50%
- Although the free form sections could generate valuable insights on the modules , analysing the results can be confusing
- The online questionnaire on the student experience proved disappointing. It had the potential to address issues that spanned multiple modules, in practice the response rate for this has usually been less than 20%.

Staff-student meetings were very useful. They were well organised and the cohort included a visible and well-trained group of representatives well able to represent their peers. It was clear from these meetings and the focus groups that students were keen to contribute comment on the course as a whole.

6. The potential contribution of student feedback

For many years collecting feedback from students has been an important part of teaching practice in universities. In a modular structure this can take the form of questionnaires distributed at the end of each module. While valuable, it can be difficult to act on the responses to questionnaires and indeed to persuade students that they are worth completing or even to convince students to read them. By their nature questionnaires completed at the end of a module provide feedback too late to benefit the current cohort of students and on occasion it can take a very long time to process questionnaires. Completing a questionnaire remains a transmissive process where students tell the university their views on their experience and their learning without engaging anybody from the university in a dialogue.

Student feedback through traditional methods has further tangible limitations:

- surveys typically command low level of responses
- students lack the knowledge to compare their experience with alternatives
- students have limited understanding of their own personal learning methods or of what is expected from their learning process in a university environment
- Variations among students' cultural backgrounds sometimes lead to misinterpretation of what is asked for

The most obvious way to enhance the quality is to create a dialogue with students to explain how their comments help course development. For example students could be encouraged to develop self-assessments of their own learning processes and for these to contribute to their process of providing feedback. As universities have moved towards greater use of constructivist approaches which rely on students' existing knowledge, it should be possible to take an approach to student feedback which builds on their understanding of the learning process. But to achieve this requires universities to work with students to teach them to provide effective feedback.

7. Conclusion

Business Schools are experiencing pressures to change their teaching methods and subject content from multiple sources. This is focusing their attention on course design and module delivery rather than evaluation. The Covid crisis has accelerated existing trends for pedagogical innovation and utilisation of the full power of ICT. Educational aims now encompass the whole student learning experience. The speed of these changes is outstripping research into evaluation methods on learning so that the focus is now on the assessment of the quality of the student experience. Both students and staff are key to this process.

While the evaluation processes do ensure that students provide an input to the management and development of the course, their involvement through the current channels falls some way short of true co-creation, where students and lecturers would work collaboratively to design a course which best met the requirements of both. At present student feedback is still being managed at a basic level. It is this evaluation method that would repay greater effort using relatively little additional resource. This could be achieved through redesign of the process of collecting the data and the education of students in the art of giving constructive comment.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Coursework and feedback to students in case study example (section 5)

Module	CW assignments and final assessment	Timing of feedback to students	markers	Practice in skills listed in table 1
Organisational Behaviour	Mid term multiple choice test	immediate	automatic	
	team presentation	immediate	tutors	Basic business skills; People management - Team working
	Final written examination			Basic business skills; problem solving, critical thinking
Economics	Multiple choice test mid term Final written exam	immediate	automatic	Basic business skills; problem solving, critical thinking
Marketing	Team marketing plan Final written exam	3 weeks	Lecturers	Basic business skills; People management problem solving, critical thinking
Supply Chain	Practical team exercise Final written exam	3 weeks for team exercise	Lecturers	Basic business skills; People management problem solving, critical thinking, learning from experience
Financial and management Accounting	Multiple choice test mid term Final written exam	immediate	automatic	Basic business skills; problem solving, critical thinking
Critical Thinking	Attendance and class participation	immediate	tutors	People management; listening, reflecting, innovative & critical thinking
	Quality of Leadership role	immediate	tutors	People management - team and meeting management
	Individual essay	3 weeks	tutors	Basic business skills; critical and organised thinking
Quantitative Methods and Analytics	Series of tests throughout the 11 week term	immediate	automatic	Basic business skills - numeracy
	Final exam – multiple choice; esay questions		Lecturer	Basic business skills - numeracy
Managing complexity and business skills	Presentation Written team report	Immediate 3 weeks	Tutors	Basic business skills - Teamworking; critical thinking
	Basic skills exercises	immediate	tutors	Basic business skills
	Individual CV and career plan	3 weeks	careers experts.	Basic business skills
	Final written exam		lecturer	Basic business skills; problem solving, critical thinking

Note: Feedback on student coursework if written must be delivered to the student within 3 weeks of submission (university policy).

Appendix 2: university module evaluation form

		Definitely disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Definitely agree	Not applicable
1. For this member of staff							
1.1	This lecturer/ tutor/ supervisor is good at explaining things and has helped me understand the module	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.2	This lecturer/ tutor/ supervisor has made the module interesting	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.3	The teaching on this module has been of a high standard.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. My progress on this Module (assessment and feedback)							
2.1	I understand the assessment criteria and what is required of me to perform well in this module	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.2	I have received helpful comments on my progress and/ or work I have submitted	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.3	Staff have been available to respond to my queries about the module and/ or my work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. For this Module							
3.1	This module is well organised and is running smoothly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.2	I have been able to access the library resources I need for this module	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.3	The Moodle resources for this module have supported my learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.4	Overall I am satisfied with the quality of the module	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.5	Ethical issues were appropriately covered in this module	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. Free Text Questions

4.1 What are the best features of this module?

4.2 How could this module be improved?

4.3 Can you provide an example of an ethical issue you thought was well covered or you thought could be appropriately covered in this module?

Thank you for your participation