

University of Dundee

The Value of Uncertainty in the Business and Management Curriculum

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The Value of Uncertainty in the Business and Management Curriculum



Introduction

Curriculum in business schools has traditionally been focused on linear analytical skills (Dunne and Martin, 2006; Glen, Suci, and Baughn, 2014) and this research directly addresses the need to update the values of business school curricula by incorporating a more creative and holistic approach to today's global challenges that are usually very complex and require a more creative lens and ability to deal with uncertainty. Design thinking has continually been trying to bring creative vibe to the rigid business world (Liedtka, 2010) and the place of design education in business school has subsequently become an important contribution to this debate.

This research paper reflects on a three-year iterative process of curriculum development run by a multidisciplinary academic team from Lancaster University Contemporary Institute of Art (LICA) and Lancaster University Management School (LUMS) supported by the engagement of the local business community.

The Context of the Research

This research paper aims to reveal the challenges of design thinking teaching practice in business curricula and to generate insights regarding how the core of design thinking can be delivered without compromising business education practice needs (Wrigley and Straker, 2017).

The research findings are based on data collected from two postgraduate modules conducted between 2017 and 2019—MBA full-time Consultancy Challenge module (annual intake of 50 students) and Innovation Practice module (annual intake between 15 and 25 students) that runs on MSc Innovation and Practice. The main contribution to the existing research related to design thinking in business curricula is the multifaceted data that this research presents. It provides an analysis of the observation of students' reactions to the exposure of design and the students' feedback to the practice of design thinking, as well as the reflections of the teaching team on their individual

and collective experience in curriculum development and delivery. The collaborative teaching team developed a design-led iterative approach to the curriculum design and kept reflective diaries, photographic evidence, and artefacts from workshops documenting annual progress and challenges. Additionally, the team reached out to the Service Design Network Teaching Fellows for advice and gained some valuable insights from the global expertise of this network.

The Development Process of Design Thinking Pedagogy and Findings

The research evidence shows that students of business and management subjects develop a certain expectation of the curriculum offering and the mode of its delivery that is predominantly linear, rational, and logical, supported by well-established and tried and tested analytical models widely applied in business. A design-led approach challenges most of the aspects of this paradigm and brings about messy room layouts, and a plethora of various materials that students are expected to engage with in order to express solutions creatively and visually (Cooper, Junginger, and Lockwood, 2009; Liedtka, 2018), and the need to embrace open-ended questions.

The teaching teams in LUMS have observed the students' tendency towards a rational analytical approach that manifested itself in the students' lack of experimentation leading to quick solutions that looked good on paper but were not feasible for client organizations (Glen et al., 2014; Glen, Suci, Baughn, and Anson, 2015).

In consideration of the overall learning aims and the thinking pattern of business students, the teaching team has been iteratively developing the pedagogy. The evolving iterations have drawn on the data collected from students and the teaching team themselves, and resulted in creating new design thinking tools that allow students to logically understand each design activity's purpose so that it can be applied to real-life working projects. The next section will present an example of this approach that was incorporated into the curriculum for the current academic year.

Design Thinking Diary

One example of the pedagogy advancement was the introduction of a "Design Thinking Diary" (see Fig. 1) which facilitated the students' sense-making of the design process and provided a tool for continuous reflection. The Diary allowed students to record the whole design journey from concept introduction, field research, idea development, business plan presentation to learning reflection. Students' feedback confirmed that the Diary not only helped students record the learning process during classes, but functioned as a tangible takeaway tool for them to use design thinking in their future work.

Conclusion and Further Research Work

This three-year student-centred design thinking pedagogy development significantly contributed to the way Lancaster University Management School structures their practice-based curriculum and enhanced the adaptation of the core value of design thinking methodology. This innovation in the business curriculum has significantly contributed to the developments of the ability in students to deal with uncertainty and navigate complex problems.

Alongside the contribution of this research and its current impact on the curriculum, the team have concluded additional issues that potentially hinder students' engagement with the design concepts. These are related to the potentially low level of credibility of the design methodology in business-related areas. Hence, the next curriculum iteration aims at addressing the right balance between the creative aspect of the learning and the proven and documented credibility of the design approach to business and management.



Figures 1-4.
'Design Thinking Diary'

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